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A PERUVIAN PARADISE.

The find of three adventurers among the Andes—A quest for treasure that brought to light a strange community—Exciting experiences among the descendants of the Incas.

(Complete in This Issue.)

CHAPTER I.—AN UNEQUAL COMBAT.

THE narrow trail wound up the mountain side like a brown ribbon, writhing in and out among the huge boulders and clumps of sturdy timber, now skirting the verge of a sheer precipice, anon following the dry bed of some torrent. Far above toward the azure arch towered the snow clad peaks of the Andes; below, the depths of the verdant valleys were almost lost in the haze of distance.

The tinkle of a silver bell was all that disturbed the silence of the day. Around a rugged spur of the mountain came a pack train, the like of which can be seen nowhere but in the Peruvian Andes.

First appeared the awkward, camel-like face of the leading pack animal—a great llama, with a silver bell fastened to a strap about its throat. By the odd creature's side trotted a half naked Indian lad, with the leading strap in his hand. Then one by one followed nearly a dozen smaller llamas, each with a pack strapped on its back. Two Indians walked beside them, while the rear of the procession was brought up by three individuals dressed in the half native, half European costume of white travelers. Two were young men, both sturdy of limb and of pleasing presence; the other was a short, "squatty" fellow with flabby cheeks and little, twinkling, pig-like eyes, almost hidden in layers of flesh. He was well along toward fifty and when he removed his broad brimmed hat to wipe his perspiring forehead, showed a well developed bald spot on top.

"This tramp hits you where you live, eh, Fitch?" laughingly inquired one of the younger men, a brown haired, sunny faced fellow.

"Hi'm getting to hold for it, Hi am, Mr. Kinsale," replied the short man, puffing like an asthmatic donkey engine. "This trading business is too bloomin' hactive, an' that's no lie. Hi'd better be back in Lunnon than 'ere in this blessed 'ole. Hit was a sorry day for Bob Fitch w'en 'e leaved a civilized country for a 'eathen land."

"And yet you've been at it the better part of ten years?" queried Kinsale. "I should think you'd have gone back before."

"Gone back, is it?" cried Fitch, with a flourish of his huge bandanna. "If Hi'd made money enough d'ye think Hi'd stay 'ere? Hi'm not such a bloomin' fool."

"Haven't made money enough in trading all these years to pay your passage home, eh?" said Kinsale, with a twinkle in his eye. "Most of you traders make two or three hundred per cent on the gimcracks you sell the natives."

"Tut, tut! never believe hall you 'ear, sir," said Fitch, with an answering grin. "But after a man's been told 'e can get gold for the pickin' hup, 'e don't want to go back to 'is hold friends an' neighbors with just a comfortable living."

"Want to cut a dash, do you?"

"Well, Hi was told Hi'd get rich 'ere," remarked Fitch drily. "Hi don't want to disappoint them as told me, sir."

"What you want is to find some of those old treasure caves of the Incas that Keeth was reading about last night."

"If I'd been trading among these mountains for ten years I'd have had a look for some of them," said the third man, with gravity.

He was a tall, black haired man of twenty five or so, well built and athletic, and with a sharp, penetrating eye. He was so dark that he made an excellent foil for Kinsale's blond face.

"That's hall nonsense, sir," declared the trader, with some emphasis. "Them yarns are just to play hoff on strangers. Nobody but a Dago would believe 'em."

"Then you don't believe in the treasures of the Incas?" queried Kinsale.

"Not Hi!" cried Fitch, with emphasis. "They say these 'ere Hinjuns," and he pointed contemptuously at the half naked llama drivers, "was once a great nation, an' 'ad hall sorts o' treasures. Nonsense, Hi says. Where's it hall gone?"

"History tells us that Pizarro's *conquistadors* got a good share of it," remarked the dark man.

"'E was another of these Dagoes, I suppose," said Fitch, who might be rather shaky on history, but had all the average Englishman's contempt for the conquerors of Peru. "'E probably lied about it."

"Oh, get out!" said Kinsale. "Pizarro and his companions found dead loads of treasure——"

"You can't convince Mr. Fitch, Ford," interrupted his friend. "That's impossible. Nothing but the actual sight of an Inca treasure house would do it."

"You're right, Mr. Keeth," declared Fitch. "If the forebears of these Hinjuns 'ad stored up gold from the old mines, as they say they did, an' other valibles, these 'ere Hinjuns of today would 'ave found it, an' spent it for rum before this."

Both his companions laughed.

"Well," said Ford Kinsale, "if Keeth doesn't locate his nitrate beds

pretty soon, *I'm* going to hunt for the Incas' old hideouts. When the Spaniards drove the tribes into the mountains they lugged a pile of treasure with 'em. It must be hidden *somewhere*."

"You get to monkeying among these mountains, off the beaten paths, and you'll be up against something you won't like," observed Keeth.

"What?"

"Well, they say all the Indians aren't as peaceable as the coast natives, or those Fitch trades with in the interior."

"I'll risk 'em," said Ford. "I'm bound to get *some* fun during my vacation. If it's going to be a brush with wild Indians, why let it come. Goodness knows, after boning down at a desk in Callao for eighteen months steady, I ought to stand a little excitement."

"Pooh! pooh!" exclaimed Fitch. "You young men don't believe half their old woman's tales about the mountain tribes, do you?"

"Fitch," said Keeth, "you're the most unbelieving man I ever saw."

"He's worse than that," cried Ford. "It's abominable. Remember, we're out for a holiday—at least, *I* am. Don't try to break down our faith in all the romantic traditions of the country. Let us believe in the descendants of the Incas themselves who, they say, inhabit the upper plateaus of the Andes."

"Nonsense! nonsense!" declared the trader, with some heat. "We're in as wild a part of the Sierras now as a white man cares to go. There's nothin' but mountains and wild beasts to the north of us. Hi've been over this trail dozens of times and Hi never even saw one o' them Hinjuns you're talking about. Hit's all a bloomin' booger story."

"If there'd been any truth in it Fitch would have been trading with them before this," interposed Keeth drily.

"That's so," said the trader. "That's just what I would——"

At that instant the steady jangling of the bell on the leading llama ceased. The pack train came to a sudden stop, the animals crowding upon one another in the narrow path.

The trail ahead was hidden by a towering spur of rock. From beyond this obstruction came the loud clash of voices and the trampling of feet.

"What's up? Another pack train?" demanded Ford.

Fitch started forward, but before he had rounded the head of his train the sound of voices had increased to a roar, above which the strokes of metal upon metal were plainly audible.

"A fight, by Jove!" cried Ford, and he started on a run up the trail.

But Keeth passed both of them before they reached the spur of rock. He unslung his rifle as he ran and when he rounded the obstruction held the weapon at a "ready."

The scene which met his gaze was a most startling one. On the narrow trail above him a group of nearly a score of Indians were struggling, and the victim of their wrath was a single individual who stood at bay with his back to the rocky wall. The Indians were fairly falling over one another in their furious endeavors to thrust the imperiled man through with their spears.

He was a slight, lithe man—a Spaniard Keeth was sure at first glance—

and his remarkable activity was all that had saved him up to this point. He was bleeding badly from several wounds, but was dexterously catching most of his enemies' thrusts upon a round rawhide shield attached to his left arm. With his own spear (it seemed his only weapon) he was doing no little damage to his foes. One lay face downward at his feet, quite dead.

The Indians themselves were plainly of a different tribe from those who bore the llama train company. They were a fiercer people—that was evident; and they were taller and more sturdy. Their soled sandals rattled on the rocky path and they fought like furies. The outcome of the uneven battle could not have long remained in doubt.

These facts Keeth saw at almost a glance. He shifted the rifle from his arm to his shoulder in a trice and the crack of the piece rose above the shouts of the savages. He had purposely aimed high, and the bullet splintered the rock above their heads. They ceased their onslaught and fell back at once, turning their angry faces toward this new antagonist.

At the same moment Ford and the trader appeared beside Keeth, both equally well armed. The Indians were evidently cowed by the appearance of the Europeans with rifles in their hands. While they hesitated, the man whom they had attacked suddenly leaped out into the trail and ran at break-neck speed toward his rescuers.

The Indians started in pursuit, but both Keeth and Ford Kinsale raised their weapons, and, instead of keeping on, the natives wheeled and scattered among the rocks, evidently expecting a volley from the guns. In a moment they were out of sight, and their victim, covered with blood and well nigh exhausted, fell into Keeth's arms.

CHAPTER II.—“WILL YOU GO?”

“WHAT about your booger stories now, Fitch?” demanded Ford, as he assisted Keeth to place the wounded stranger on the ground.

But the trader, leaving his two companions to care for the victim of the Indians' wrath, ran forward and examined the dead man lying in the trail. When he returned he found the stranger sitting up with his back against a boulder and Keeth bathing his face. Ford and the three llama drivers were looking on, Ford's expression depicting the liveliest interest, the Indians' features as expressionless as so many tobacco store signs.

“There ben't nothin' strange about *them* Hinjuns,” declared the Londoner.

“What do you mean?” asked Keeth, looking up.

“Hi know them,” said Fitch. “They were mountain Hinjuns, but Hi've been among 'em hall. They're as civilized as my llama men 'ere,” and he pointed to the three drivers.

“They acted mighty civilized,” said Ford. “If we'd been a minute later our friend here would likely have been a victim of their excessive civilization.”

“Hi don't understand it,” muttered Fitch, jerking his thumb over his shoulder at the dead man. “Hi've hoften traded with that fellow yonder.”

The wounded man opened his eyes once or twice ; but his conflict with the Indians had completely exhausted him, and he rallied slowly. There was a nasty wound in his forehead just at the roots of the hair and the blood had streamed down his face ; Keeth wiped it away carefully. There was no other serious wound, but upon the right cheek, just below the eye, was a mark tattooed upon the skin about the size of an American half dollar. Keeth's attention was at once attracted to the cabalistic figure and he pointed it out to Ford and the trader.

Upon the three white men the tattooed sign made no impression other than serving to stimulate their curiosity. But it had a most surprising effect upon the three Indians who were staring over their employer's shoulder at the wounded Spaniard. They began to jabber together in their own tongue, pointing excitedly at the strange mark.

"Well, wot's the matter with *you*?" demanded Fitch, who, despite his ten years' experience in Peru, had never been able to master the "gibberish" of the natives, and even spoke the Spanish with a Cockney accent that would have driven a linguist crazy.

"Senor," said the oldest of the drivers, replying in fair English, "no good you he'p that man. We come away and leave him here, eh?"

"What's that? Leave the poor fellow here to die?" cried Ford.

"What's the matter with 'im?" demanded the trader. "'E ain't got the small pox, has he?"

"He mooch better haf small poc. We no he'p him. We mooch better go on and leave him."

"Why, Hi'd like to know?" cried Fitch.

The Indian pointed slowly to the tattooed cheek.

"What the dickens does he mean, Fitch?" asked Ford.

"Some o' their bloomin' superstition, Hi suppose," replied the trader, in disgust. Then turning to the Indian he said: "Now look-er 'ere, Juan, Hi wanter know wot you mean? Wot's the matter with this 'ere fellow that we should leave 'im hout 'ere on the trail to die?"

Again the Indian pointed solemnly to the tattoo mark.

"He is forbid," he said.

Fitch muttered an oath ; but the llama driver continued :

"Senor, that sign is a command to us. We must obey. He is accursed. He should die!"

Keeth reached for his Winchester and cocked it.

"Tell them that if they undertake to follow out that idea I'll give them a taste of lead myself," he said to Fitch.

"Don't you fret, Mr. Keeth," returned the trader. "Hi'm blessed if I 'aven't a mind to 'ide the 'ole three of them. The hignerant niggers!"

"What do you mean by his being accursed?" asked Ford, looking at Juan.

"*Los Americanos* ees stranger here, eh? You know not my people," said the Indian, drawing himself up proudly. "We were a great people once. We haf not forget that, though we speak a tongue other than our own and worship a god other than that of our forefathers. But that mark we know."

He pointed to the Spaniard's cheek. "Het was known to our ancestors long before the Spaniards conquered the land. *He is accursed!*"

The Indian laid his hand on the long knife at his belt; but Keeth was watching him.

"Not on your life!" he exclaimed, snatching up his weapon again. "I tell you this fellow shan't be hurt. Disarm that scamp, Fitch."

The Indian sprang back with flashing eyes.

"The senor knows not what he does," he said hoarsely. "Het is at your life's risk that you assist that man."

"Well, we'll risk it," interposed Ford. "But you keep your hand off that knife, my friend."

"You fellows go back to your places," commanded the trader. "An' don't let's 'ear hanny more of it. We'll make a 'urdle to carry the poor lad on."

But the Indians jabbered together and did not move.

"Come, do you 'ear?" cried Fitch, glowering at Juan and his companions.

"Does the senor leave that man?" demanded Juan.

"No, sir; 'e is going with us to 'Ualpa."

"Den we not go wit' yon," declared the Indian.

"You rascal, you!" cried the trader, shaking his fist at him. "Hif you leave me in the lurch this way you'll not get a cent of your pay, hand when I get back to the coast Hi'll make you sweat for hit, too!"

"*Bueno!* It must be so!" responded Juan, with a shrug of his shoulders. "*Adios, senor!*"

He turned on his heel, and, with his two companions, passed out of sight down the trail, leaving Fitch in a state of rage bordering on apoplexy.

"Come, come, Fitch," said Keeth. "There's no 'use talking that way. How far is the next town?"

"Oh, we can get to 'Ualpa tonight if this chap don't keep us back too much," growled the trader.

"I'll answer for him. We won't have to carry him; he'll be able to walk, I think. Ford, you'll help Mr. Fitch with the beasts, won't you?"

"Sure," responded Kinsale.

"We'd best camp here for lunch, I'm thinking," pursued Keeth. "Lemme that flask in your pocket, Fitch."

The Cockney handed over the liquor and then went back with Ford to bring up the pack train. Keeth forced a little of the spirits between the lips of the wounded man. He choked, opened his eyes, and struggled into a more upright position.

"Senor," he said weakly, "you haf safed my life—you and your comrades."

"How are you feeling?" asked Keeth.

"Better—mooch better." He looked hastily about. "The Indians?" he queried. "Where are they?"

"Skipped out," replied the American. "Their spears were hardly of use against our Winchesters."

"Ah—yes. Had I possessed a gun I should haf shown a better fight."

"You might have driven them off; but I doubt if you could have put up a pluckier front," returned Keeth, with admiration. "Why did they set upon you?"

A shadow crossed the Spaniard's face.

"That, senor, I can scarce tell you—at least, so that you would understand." He raised one hand to his cheek and touched the tattooed mark.

"Eet was *this*," he said. "I am accursed, senor."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Keeth, in surprise.

"Wait, senor. I cannot talk yet. Your name?"

"Ronald Keeth, at your service."

"*Americano?*"

"Yes. From New York. Civil engineer, representing the Peruvian Nitrate Company."

"Thank you; I shall always remember you, Senor Keeth."

"Well, well," returned Keeth, "don't think your rescue entirely due to me. Here are my companions—Mr. Ford Kinsale, of Callao, and Robert Fitch, trader," and he waved his hand toward Ford and Fitch.

"Senors, your servant," said the Spaniard, inclining his head to all. "I am Jose Rodriguez, a name not unknown in the coast towns, when my father was alive; but I am the last of my family."

"And your family come mighty near bein' snuffed hout," said Fitch.

"What was the row between you an' them Hinjuns, if Hi might be so bold as to hask, sir?"

"There was nothing between me and *them*, senor," replied Rodriguez slowly.

"Come, come! they weren't trying to kill you just for fun?" cried the trader. "Wot do you tyke us for? We're no hinfants."

The Spaniard again touched the mark on his cheek.

"See you this, senor?" he asked.

"What of it?" replied Fitch curiously.

"Those who tattooed it there did so for a sign, that wherever I went among these mountains it should be known that I had escaped from their hands. It is a sign—aye, perhaps a command, *quien sabe?*—for all Indians to kill me."

His three listeners looked at one another curiously.

"Explain yourself, Senor Rodriguez," said Keeth. "What you say is a riddle to us."

The Spaniard took another sip of the strong liquor and a little color came into his cheeks.

"If you insist, senor," he said gravely, "I will tell you. You haf safed my life. Eet is only right that you should know my story."

"Go ahead," said the trader, beginning to fill his pipe. "This 'ere's th' bloominest start ever *Hi* see."

"Know you then," began the Spaniard, "that for three years I haf been a prisoner among a tribe of Indians many leagues to the nort' of here—Indians as different from the miserable creatures of the coast as dark is from light."

"What do you think of *that*, Fitch?" interrupted Ford Kinsale.

"Dry up, Ford," commanded Keeth. "Let Senor Rodriguez tell his story."

"I haf always been of an adventurous nature, senors," continued the Spaniard. "I was hunting with a single guide among the upper Andes. We were set upon by a party of these savages, my guide killed, and I taken prisoner. For three years I haf lived among them, I say.

"Senors, they are as untamed, as warlike, as mooch heathen—*Dios* help them!—as were their ancestors when the gr-eat Pizarro led his conquestadors to old Cuzco. And with them, senors—with them, I say—I spent t'ree long years. Ah! they were terrible years. But I am repaid—ah, yes, senors!" He looked from one to the other of his listeners. "Senors," he whispered, "*I haf knowledge of the lost treasures of the Incas!*"

The faces of Keeth and Ford Kinsale displayed their interest; but the trader's ruddy countenance was white, and he stared at the speaker with wide open eyes and mouth.

"I, Jose Rodriguez, learned that which the Indians themselves knew not," pursued the Spaniard. "I learned the secret which their old men had forgotten. Aye, I was their captive, but I had eyes. *Si*, senor, I haf seen the Incas' cave."

"The Incas' cave?" repeated Keeth.

"*Si*, senor. The cave of wealth; the tr-easure house of the great Incas who ruled this land when my countrymen conquered it. My eyes haf been blinded by the glare of gold—dazzled by the flash of such gems as would fitly adorn a monarch's crown. I, Jose Rodriguez, haf seen all dis!"

He uttered these words excitedly, and looked from Keeth to his friends with keenest scrutiny.

"You doubt me, senors!" he cried. "Look! behold!"

With trembling fingers he tore open his coat and thrust one hand into a slit in its lining. In an instant he drew forth a thin bar of metal half a foot in length and three or four inches wide. It was dead yellow in hue.

He threw it down at their feet and brought out three others from the same hiding place. Fitch pounced upon them like a hawk. He touched his tongue to a bar, bit it, and turned to his companions with a face as white as chalk.

"Gold—virgin gold, as Hi'm a livin' man!" he gasped.

"Where those came from, senors," went on Rodriguez, becoming calmer as his listeners' excitement increased, "were great heaps of such bars—wealth, senors! Reeches beyond belief!"

"And those are all you brought away?" demanded Keeth.

"*Si*, senor—all. I was alone; I believed I was pursued, though now I t'ink I was not. Eet was t'rough the old treasure cavern I make my escape, an' its entrance has been lost to the Indians themselves for generations. I found it quite by accident. They perhaps t'ink me drown'; but, by the blessing of *Sancta Maria*, I was safe. I travel many days t'rough these mountains.

"Then I fall in with the Indians from whom you rescued me. They were kind to me at first; but when they see this"—he pointed to the tattoo mark again—" *Carramba!* they all like fiends. The mark was placed there soon after I was captured. 'Eet is a sign known to all the Indes of the Andes. Only for eet I would——"

He stopped and looked searchingly into their faces.

"You would what?" demanded Ford.

"I would go back an' secure some of the lost wealth of the Incas!"

Fitch pressed forward.

"See 'ere," he said eagerly. "If a man could fix it so nobody would see that mark, would you risk it?"

"Can *you* do that, *senor*?" demanded the Spaniard, his eyes flashing.

"Hi believe so," returned the trader. "Hi've got some grease paint in one of my packs—such as hactors use. I carry a little of everything. Hi believe Hi could make you hup so that your mother wouldn't know you."

"If you can do this, *senor*——"

Rodriguez looked about at the two younger men, studying their eager faces carefully.

"Will you all t'ree go?" he said. "There is enough and to spare for all. 'Eet is dangerous. Death lurks not alone in savage foes, but in the trails, the torrents to be crossed, the precipices to be scaled. But the prize—t'ink of the prize! Wealth beyond your dreams, *senors*! Will you go?"

CHAPTER III.—A FRIGHTFUL CATASTROPHE.

KEETH and Ford looked at each other questioningly. To the latter the venture suggested by the Spaniard appeared very alluring for its own sake; to Keeth, the struggling young civil engineer, the possibility of finding wealth such as Rodriguez declared he had seen was indeed tempting.

It was true that the story the Spaniard told sounded visionary—in fact, seemed impossible in the year of grace, eighteen ninety odd. But Rodriguez appeared honest; his words rang true; and, stronger evidence than all, there were the bars of yellow gold before them. There was no discounting them.

Keeth reached out and grasped Jose Rodriguez' hand.

"I'll go with you," he said. "There's my hand on it."

"And you, *senors*?" inquired the Spaniard, turning to Kinsale and the excited trader.

"If Keeth is willing to risk it, *I* am," declared Ford.

"An' as for me," said the Cockney, wiping his forehead furiously with the bandanna, "you couldn't keep me hout of it. Bob Fitch 'll never refuse a chance to make 'is fortune, Hi 'ope."

"But I thought you didn't believe in any of these yarns about the Incas, and all that sort of thing," suggested Ford slyly.

"That's hall right, young man, that's hall right," responded the trader, with some asperity. "Mabbe Hi don't believe in every cock an' bull story Hi 'ear; but Hi believe in solid gold bars like *them*," and he handled the yellow metal caressingly.

"Senors," said Rodriguez, "I feel better. Give me of food, for I haf eat not'ing for two days."

"Give 'im a bit of that *tassajo* to chew," commanded the trader. "It won't do to feed 'im too 'igh at first. 'Ow long 'ave you been traveling in these 'ere bloomin' mountains?"

"Quite two weeks, senor. But only till two days ago did I quite lose my way."

"Well, you're 'alf a day's journey to 'Ualpa now," said Fitch.

"Ah, I haf come a long way—a long way," muttered the Spaniard, shaking his head slowly.

"And you are sure you can find your way back?" inquired Ford anxiously.

"After reaching a certain place in the mountains—eet must be 'tirty mile to the nort' of here—I shall know the way back to de Incas' cave ver' well."

"But how will we find this place?"

"We must haf a guide to that spot, senors. Eet is a place known to many of the mountain people—eet *must* be known to them. Eet is a spot where three great pines overhang a chasm. There ees a bridge across the river—a bridge which you, Senor *Ingeniero*, will wonder at," and he bowed to Keeth.

"I don't like that," interrupted Fitch. "We'll 'ave to tyke one o' these bloody savages into hour confidence."

"Oh, these Indians are perfectly civilized," interjected Ford, with a grimace.

"Shut up, Ford," commanded Keeth. "I agree with Fitch. It will be dangerous to allow an Indian of any tribe to accompany us. If they are all banded together as they appear to be——"

"I t'ink, senor, that we can get a guide wit'out arousing suspicions as to our intentions. Let us once get to the three pines and I will get rid of the guide on some pretense—send him back for food, or ammunition, or somet'ing. Surely, somet'ing will turn up—*quien sabe?*"

"That's hall right," growled Fitch; "but Hi don't like goin' hit so blind."

"Don't be a wet blanket," interposed Ford. "Come, let's have some lunch ourselves. We ought to be on our way to Hualpa."

"Before we start it would be better for Senor Feetch to try to cover this," and Jose touched the tattoo mark upon his cheek. "I wish to enter Hualpa wit'out that so plainly showing."

"Good hidea," returned the trader, and he got out his paint at once.

Keeth had bound up the cut in Jose's forehead and removed all traces of blood and dust from his face. Fitch set to work, and with more art than his American friends would have given him credit for, changed the Spaniard's appearance completely. The mark was entirely hidden, although the paint had to be laid on rather heavily for the purpose; but when the job was done it would stand pretty close scrutiny.

"Hi'll guarantee none o' them Hinjuns will know you now, sir," said

Fitch, with satisfaction. "The only thing is, you must be careful about getting water on your face; that 'll have to be renewed every day or two."

"Well, let's move on," proposed Keeth. "How do you feel, Senor Rodriguez? Think you can get along by leaning on my arm?"

"I belief so," replied the Spaniard. "Let me try."

He got upon his feet and, although a bit unsteady at first, managed to walk quite well with Keeth's aid.

"Start up the leader, Mr. Kinsale," said Fitch. "Blow th' hugly beast! Hi 'ope this 'll be the last tradin' trip Bob Fitch ever 'as to make."

"Don't conjure up *too* rosy a prospect," rejoined Ford, laughing. "The disappointment, if we shouldn't bring back the treasure, will be all the greater if you do."

"Don't you worry, sir," said the trader, with emphasis. "If there's gold in them 'ills yonder like that Senor Rodriguez showed us, Hi'm goin' to 'ave my share, an' don't you forget it!"

In a short time they got the llamas started up the trail, and with Fitch in the lead and the Spaniard, leaning on Keeth's arm, hobbling along in the rear, moved on Hualpa. The little mountain settlement was reached just at dusk. Their entrance was scarcely noticed, and they smuggled Rodriguez into a back room of the hotel without attracting the least attention. They were anxious that their wounded acquaintance should not be recognized by any of the party of Indians who had attacked him, if they were lurking about the town.

Fitch made a bargain with a returning trader, who happened to be at the *posada*, to take his whole stock, and got rid of his llamas as well. Through the same agent, Jose Rodriguez sold one of his bars of gold, with the proceeds of which he purchased an outfit for the proposed journey into the interior of the Sierras. The other bars he deposited with a fellow countryman living at Hualpa.

Rodriguez' wound having nearly healed at the end of a week, and he having recovered from the fatigues of his experience in the mountains, preparations were made for an immediate start upon what they were careful to make public was a search for nitrate beds. Keeth, whose firm was well known in the town, took command and his presence gave color to the avowed intentions of the party. But it was left to Fitch to engage a guide, for he had had the longer experience in dealing with the Indians.

And he found a man who more than satisfied Keeth and Ford Kinsale. Neither of them had ever seen such a big man among the Indians of the coast. Fitch declared him to be a member of an interior tribe—one which he had occasionally traded with—far superior in point of intelligence, as well as in form and feature, to the natives who made up the bulk of Hualpa's population. Rodriguez expressed no opinion of the guide at all. In fact, he did not see him until the party were ready to leave the *posada* on the morning of departure.

The Indian was known by the name of Manuel, he having probably been baptized into the Catholic church, by some wandering priest, when a child. Nominally all the native Peruvians are under priestly control, although their

ignorance of religious, as well as other matters, is appalling. He was a man fully six feet in height—as tall as Ronald Keeth himself—with a mighty chest and arms like a gladiator. He wore a loose tunic of cured skin, sandals, and very little else. His right shoulder was untrammelled by even the sack-like tunic, but the garment was belted in at the waist and fell nearly to his knees. He carried a long knife in his belt, and a spear for a staff. His long black hair made other covering for his head unnecessary, and the thongs of his sandals, wound round and round his ankles, protected those parts from the rocks.

He professed himself entirely familiar with the Sierras for a hundred leagues to the north of Hualpa, and agreed to guide the party directly to the spot where the three pines overhung the gorge. For a small sum in addition he offered to *carry* one of them the entire distance in a chair, or cradle, such as these mountaineers often bear upon their shoulders. But none of the four cared to travel in that precarious way.

"Hi've rid on one of these fellows' backs," said Fitch; "but one trip was enough. Hi was sicker than w'en I come acrost from Lunnon ten year ago. A man don't feel safe swingin' over precipices a thousand feet deep, with nothin' but a strap around a Hinjun's 'ead a-holdin' of 'im on."

They left Hualpa early one morning and set out over a trail to the north, a path which showed for the first few miles that it was much traveled. Each one in the party carried a pack strapped to his shoulders, and Keeth bore a coil of small, though very stout, hemp rope. The four Europeans were heavily armed, and Ford, because of his inexperience, and Fitch, because of his blind contempt for the inhabitants of the mountains, felt confident that they would be more than a match for any party of wild Indians which might attack them. Jose Rodriguez assured them that the tribe who had held him captive so long knew nothing about the use of firearms, fighting entirely with bows and arrows, spears, and great war clubs.

"W'y," cried Fitch, in talking it over, "we can go right in, harmed as we are, hand drive the 'ole crowd hout of the mountains."

But the Spaniard shook his head. There were places in the mountains, he knew, where a man with merely a bow and arrows could hold a whole army at bay.

Before they stopped for their noon meal the guide led them off the main trail into a side path which was much more arduous to follow. It wound up and up among the rocks, occasionally crossing an almost level plateau, then winding about the base of a peak which, snow covered to the summit, towered far above them among the clouds. The atmosphere among these peaks was chill, and at night they were glad to descend beyond the ridge into a clump of hardy trees and build a huge campfire before which to stretch themselves for rest.

It had been the hardest day's march Ford had ever experienced; but it told the most upon the trader, whose figure was too corpulent to make walking a pleasure. Poor Fitch fell asleep immediately after supper and slept right on until nearly morning, when, in common with the others, he was awakened by an entirely unlooked for incident.

When the party had sought their blankets (the guide assured them there was no necessity of standing watch), the stars were shining brightly in an unflecked sky; but they awoke just before sunrise in the midst of a mountain tempest. The thunder was roaring overhead and the lightning crackling from peak to peak, illuminating the gorge in which they were encamped with an unearthly, flickering light.

Then came the rain—not in drops, or in sheets, but simply pouring out of the heart of a cloud which had torn its way across the face of a neighboring peak. It was a cloudburst in earnest, and in an instant they were all wet to the skin. There was no shelter at hand from the furious downfall, and all they could do was to imitate Manuel. He squatted upon his haunches on the shelving side of the gorge and made a tent of his blanket, covering himself completely.

In a little while the tiny stream at the bottom of the gorge had become a rushing, roaring torrent, sweeping boulders, fallen timber, and all sorts of débris down its course. But the stream subsided as fast as it had gathered strength when the storm ceased.

The rising sun found them in a drearily saturated state. There was no dry wood and every vestige of their fire had been swept away.

"*Tassajo* and left over cakes don't make a *very* appetizing breakfast, do they?" said Ford ruefully. "But this must be part of the 'roughing it' I wanted, I suppose." Then he looked at Rodriguez and suddenly burst out laughing.

"What do you find to laugh at?" demanded Keeth, who had been rummaging over his pack to see that all was right.

But Ford brought himself up suddenly in the middle of his laugh and glanced around at Manuel, the guide. He stood a little way off with his eyes fixed intently upon Jose's unconscious face. The sudden rainfall had played sad havoc with the Spaniard's "make-up." The grease paint was washed completely off in streaks, and the cabalistic mark upon his cheek was plainly visible.

The instant the Indian saw Ford's eyes turned upon him he withdrew his own gaze from the Spaniard's face and went about some unimportant task as coolly as though he had seen nothing. But young Kinsale was confident that he had noted the tattoo mark.

His thoughtless laughter had called Keeth's attention to the havoc made by the storm, and he pointed it out to the trader.

"Confound him! I 'ope that bloomin' Hinjun didn't notice it," muttered the Englishman, snatching up his paints and beckoning Jose to go with him.

"But he *did*," Ford declared to his friend. "If there's any truth in the yarn that all these Indians understand the meaning of that mark, we'd better keep a mighty sharp watch on Manuel yonder."

But the guide seemed entirely oblivious of the accident. When Jose and Fitch returned, the former with the damage repaired, the Indian did not vouchsafe him a glance. But Keeth took pains to place Rodriguez on his guard.

"Eet ees a misfortune, but what can one do now—eh, wha-at?" he asked, with a shrug of his shoulders.

After their frugal meal they set off on the blind trail which Manuel seemed to follow more by instinct than by sight. If the first day's jaunt had been arduous this was doubly so. They made scarcely ten miles from sunrise to sunset. The grandeur of the scenery in these Peruvian Andes cannot be surpassed even in the Himalayas; but grand scenery could not make poor Fitch forget the toils of the journey.

Since the occurrence of the early morning the white men watched their guide very closely. They feared he would play them some trick, and to be left alone in this wild region, with but a fleeting remembrance of the path over which they had come, was not a pleasant possibility.

"But how the dickens will we find our way back, any way?" demanded Ford, as they talked the matter over.

"That is a risk we must run if we would find the Incas' cave, I take it," replied Keeth. "But what do you think, *Senor Rodriguez*? Shouldn't we have reached the three pines you spoke of before this?"

"We cannot be a great way from them now, if the man is not playing us false," replied the Spaniard. "But I haf yet to see the first familiar landmark."

The pines were not sighted that day; but upon being questioned Manuel declared that he would get them to the place by the middle of the next forenoon. For fear that he contemplated treason, it was agreed that one of the white men should remain awake all night, and this watch was faithfully kept.

Soon after leaving their second night's camping place they began to descend into a deep valley. The sides of the mountain were heavily timbered, and Manuel led them through the pathless forest as unerringly as the crow flies. Just before noon they came out upon a high bluff overlooking a swiftly flowing river, several rods across. As soon as they came out of the timber, *Jose Rodriguez* uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Eet is the same," he muttered. "I could not be mistak'."

"Recognize the place, do you?" demanded Keeth, who walked beside him.

"*Sí, señor*. We be not far from the pines, and the wonderful bridge of which I tol' you."

Manuel set off up the stream, which flowed three or four hundred feet below them. It rapidly narrowed until, just after passing a sharp bend, they reached a spot where it was scarcely a dozen yards across. A few rods before them the three huge pine trees leaned over the gulf from the opposite bank. Near the trees a great log, surely three feet thick at the butt, spanned the abyss.

"For heaven's sake," cried Keeth, "what manner of men must have been the people who placed that timber in position?"

"Ah, I knew the *senor* would be surprised," said *Rodriguez*, showing his teeth in a smile. "Ees eet not wonderful—eh, wh-at? That, *Senor Feetch*," he added, turning to the trader, "was done by these same savages

whom you profess to think so poorly of." Then in a low voice, that the guide might not hear, and with a wave of his hand toward the opposite mountain slope: "Beyond that stream lies the country of the tribe with whom I lived so long. We must not let this man go farther wit' us."

"But what shall we do?" demanded Keeth. "How will we get rid of him?"

"Let us cross and camp for our noon meat. I will find some way to rid us of his presence."

"But can we find our way back without him?" asked Ford.

"That we must reesk."

"Go ahead," said Fitch recklessly. "Hi'm goin' to see this 'ere thing through, wotever comes."

But when they reached the bridge even Ronald Keeth shrank from crossing it.

"Ah, senors, eet ees simple," exclaimed Rodriguez, noting their hesitancy.

He motioned Manuel to lead the way and leaped upon the end of the timber himself. The guide started across the gulf as nonchalantly as though he were crossing a perfectly secure bridge with a hand rail on either side instead of a tree trunk which quivered and shook with every step. The Spaniard followed close on his heels.

"Hold on, let's see how they get across," said Keeth, and he and his two friends watched Jose and the guide with intense interest.

But they crossed without mishap, and immediately upon feeling the solid rock beneath his feet Jose turned and swung his hat encouragingly. For an instant his back was turned to the guide. That instant was evidently the opportunity for which Manuel had been waiting.

Before Keeth or his comrades could utter the warning shout which rose to their lips the huge Indian had seized the slight form of the Spaniard about the waist. He pinioned one arm, but Jose must have possessed muscles of steel. He twisted about in the giant's grasp and seized him in turn by the throat. Neither could draw his knife, and for a moment they swayed and struggled on the verge of the precipice.

Uttering a loud shout Keeth, forgetting the swaying bridge, sprang upon the log and ran toward the scene of the battle. He drew his pistol from its sheath as he went, but he dared not fire, the men were so closely interlocked. The timber swayed frightfully beneath his feet, but he scarcely noticed the vibration. His eyes were on that struggling pair. He saw nothing else.

Suddenly Jose tore his other arm loose. Instantly his freed fingers sought his belt, he drew the knife, and like a flash struck it into the guide's breast! The Indian staggered back, but not for an instant did his grip about his antagonist's body relax. Gathering his waning powers for one desperate effort, he sprang forward to the edge of the cliff and pitched headfirst into the gulf, carrying the Spaniard with him!

They whirled over and over in the air as they descended, striking the water with a mighty splash at last, and disappeared beneath the surface.

Keeth fell face downward upon the timber, and clung there with both arms outstretched, striving to pierce the swiftly flowing water with tear blinded eyes. But neither the Indian nor his victim came to the surface again.

CHAPTER IV.—TRAPPED.

WITH limbs which almost refused to bear him up Keeth finally crept to the end of the log and stood upon the solid rock. Ford and the trader were but a moment behind him. In their excitement they crossed the yawning gulf with scarcely a tremor ; but the engineer was so dizzy and ill he could scarcely stand.

"Poor Jose !" exclaimed Ford Kinsale. "We should have kept a closer watch on that fiendish savage."

"What an awful death !" murmured Keeth, still unable to look over the cliff's edge without shuddering.

"But wot are *we* goin' to do now?" demanded Fitch.

"Come," said the engineer, shaking himself together. "We must find some way to descend this bluff. We must find Jose's body and give it decent burial, at least. The river is full of eddies and snags. It may be along shore there."

"We've got hourselves to think of first," objected Fitch.

"Oh, come along ; let's be unselfish," said Ford. "The poor chap is dead, of course ; but, as Keeth says, we may recover the body. I believe he'd done as much for one of us. I must say he was the only Spaniard I ever cottoned to."

Keeth was already examining the rugged face of the bluff. It was not all rock ; there were some treacherous looking gravel slopes. In a few moments he began to descend, and his comrades, trusting themselves to his leadership, followed. He had found the only place in the bluff, as far as they could see, where descent was possible ; but when they got within thirty feet or so of the foot, they were forced to halt. From that point the place was a sheer precipice, so smooth that a mountain goat could not have found a foothold.

"Got us hin a box, Mr. Keeth, you 'ave," declared Fitch.

"Oh, dry up," said Ford. "We can go back and try again."

"*Hi* don't try no more," declared the trader, with emphasis. "Hi've got enough. It looks mighty like we wouldn't be able to crawl back hup there, any'ow."

"We won't talk about getting up till we've got down," said Keeth quietly, and he began to uncoil the rope he carried.

"There you have it !" exclaimed Ford. "I'd forgotten the rope. Here's just the place to fasten it."

A huge boulder, sunk deep in the bluff, hung over the narrow beach below. Keeth quickly knotted one end of the cable over this projecting rock and then swung down the remaining distance to the verge of the river. Ford and the trader quickly followed him.

The shore was not a dozen feet broad at any point within their view, and

the river raced along with a sullen murmur. The water was low now. In time of freshet the river doubtless filled its bed from bluff to bluff, entirely covering the narrow strip of shingle. They had made the descent of the bank some distance below the bridge. There were plenty of little eddies near the shore, and great black snags reached their ugly limbs far out into the river; but the thing which they hoped to find caught among these obstructions did not appear. The treacherous guide and his victim, locked in that awful embrace, seemed to have sunk to the bottom of the stream and remained there.

They searched the margin of the river as far down as they could go. At the sharp bend half a mile or so below the bridge the shore ceased. They could go no farther. The bluff above them looked forbidding and unscalable. The only path by which they might return to the summit was the one down which they had scrambled.

"Come, we may as well go back," said Keeth, in despair. "Poor Jose is beyond our reach."

"You fellows will 'ave to 'elp me hup that rope," declared Fitch gloomily. "This cliff climbing hain't wot Hi'm built for."

"Oh, we'll get you up all right," said Ford. "What we'll do when we are up again is what's bothering me."

"Hit looks to me as though we was in a box—that's wot it looks like."

"Don't you believe we can find our way back to Hualpa?" inquired Keeth.

"Mabbe," replied Fitch. "But Hi know bloomin' well we cau't find the treasure cave, now the Dago's gone."

"All you think of is the treasure," said Ford, in disgust.

"That's wot we started hout 'or," returned the trader stoutly. "Hit's blessed awkward that Jose was killed, if 'ee 'ad to be killed, before 'ee told us 'ow to get to the cave."

"You're a cold blooded chap, Fitch."

But Keeth made no comment. They reached the point where the rope had been left dangling from the protruding boulder, and Keeth prepared to mount.

"I'll go up first and give you a lift, Ford. Together we can pull Mr. Fitch up, I guess."

He laid hold of the hemp and began to ascend hand over hand, bracing his feet against the rock as he went. He had not gone up a dozen feet, however, when something gave way above. He dropped several feet and the gravel and broken rock fell about him in a shower.

"Great heavens, Keeth!" shouted Ford. "Come back! The whole cliff is falling!"

The trader caught him by the legs and pulled him down. Through the falling débris they could see the huge boulder, around which the rope had been fastened, toppling slowly outward. Ford and Fitch seized Keeth's hands and ran with him along the beach. An instant later the mass of rock had fallen directly upon the spot on which they had stood! Tons upon tons of earth and gravel followed the rock and a huge fissure was made in the bluff side.

When the noise ceased and the débris stopped falling, the three adventurers gazed at one another with pallid faces. Not only had they narrowly escaped an awful death, but they were now stranded upon the margin of the river. The path to the summit of the bluff was obliterated!

"Trapped, by Jove!" exclaimed Ford.

But Keeth ran back to the heap of earth and rock and rescued the rope which had already been of such service to them.

"We won't say that till we try up stream," he said, returning to his comrades. "Come along."

"What do *you* think, Fitch?" demanded Ford.

Fitch may have been pessimistic as regarded small things; but now that a real catastrophe faced them, he developed a genuine English bulldog grit.

"We hain't dead yet," he declared, shaking his head. "*Hi'm* not goin' to spend the rest of my days down 'ere—not if *Hi* know myself!"

But after tramping by the margin of the stream for several miles, and coming to no point where the bluff was scalable, even he began to lose hope.

"We're getting deeper and deeper into the country of those Indians of whom Jose told us," said Keeth. "If we should fall in with them it might go harder with us than it did with him. I don't fancy remaining three years a captive, as he did."

"What *will* you do?" cried Ford, who was quite disheartened. "Stand here and wait for the first freshet to drown you? I'm going ahead if I walk a hundred miles along this confounded shore. There must be *some* way to get to the summit of the bank."

But the way did not appear, and just before daylight faded from the sky and the night shadows settled upon the surface of the waters, their further progress was barred by a wide break in the shore. The river lapped the rocky wall; there was not even a narrow shelf to offer a foothold. So they made themselves as comfortable as circumstances allowed and prepared to spend the night.

CHAPTER V.—A RESCUE AND A MENACE.

FORD and the trader slept like logs after the fatigues of the day; but Ronald Keeth was awake long before the first finger of light traced the outline of the distant mountain peaks. Their situation, shut into the gorge as they appeared to be, disturbed him. To be lost in this barren wilderness was bad enough; but to be inclosed upon a narrow strip of land, scarcely ten yards wide at its broadest point, and in places so narrow that only a footpath separated the insurmountable cliff from the black river, was infinitely worse.

He arose from his uncomfortable couch as soon as it was light enough in the gorge to see and examined the strip of water which had halted them the night before. The bluff was a sheer precipice here, with not the faintest sign of a path. But his anxious eye caught sight of a weather beaten stub protruding from the gravelly shore beyond this belt of water. Once a tree had stood there; but some furious freshet had broken it off three or four feet from the ground.

The river was deep and ran like a millrace between the spot on which he stood and this old stump. No man could breast the fierce current, supposing even that it was not too deep to be waded. But Keeth was an ingenious fellow, and had experienced life in some of the wilder portions of the States before coming to Peru. He had accompanied a United States exploring expedition through Arizona and New Mexico before his twenty first birthday, and had learned in those cattle raising countries something of the value of a thirty foot rope. The instant he saw the stump he saw as well a way out of the present difficulty.

He caught up the coil of hemp, made a running noose, and planted his feet firmly on the edge of the water, preparatory to making a cast.

"If the rope's long enough to reach, and that old stub holds, we're all right," he thought, as he swung the coils about his head.

It was a long cast, and the loop did not fall over the stub at the first or second trial; but Keeth was delighted to see it drop just where he wanted it to the next time. However, when he had drawn it taut, he found it so short that he could not fasten it at the side of the inlet, and he had to shout for his companions to help him. Ford and the Englishman came running with their rifles in their hands, fully believing that he had been attacked by Indians; but they forgave him for disturbing their morning nap when they discovered what he had done.

"Hit's a great 'ead you 'ave, Mr. Keeth," declared Fitch. "Hi'd never thought of it."

"But will the stump hold?" asked Ford Kinsale.

"We'll all get hold of the line and try it," replied Keeth. "We know the rope is all right. If it holds, I'll cross over and help you fellows across."

The stub proved to be firmly set in the ground, and without waiting for breakfast Keeth removed his clothing and prepared to make the passage of the river. He wrapped his garments in his blanket, swathed his gunlock in oily rags, and slinging both bundle and weapon over his shoulder, plunged into the water. Ford hung to the end of the rope and steadied him, and although Keeth's feet were almost immediately swept from beneath him, he managed to reach the opposite shore without serious difficulty. He hurried into his damp clothing and helped Fitch across, and then flung the rope back to Ford and, with the trader's assistance, drew his friend, and the provisions, over the flood.

"Well, I pray heaven we won't have to cross another such place," Kinsale panted, as they drew him to land. "I'm not half as anxious to see the Incas' cave as I was when poor Jose was telling us about it."

"I thought you were looking for lots of excitement this vacation," said Keeth slyly.

"Oh, we're having too much fun," declared Ford ruefully. "I didn't know what I was talking about. If ever I get back to Callao I shan't ask for another vacation for ten years."

They marched along the shingle for some miles further, fortunately finding it good traveling all the way; but it was nearly noon before they reached what

seemed a promising path to the top of the cliffs. The foot of this trail was extremely rugged, but it looked better above, and with Keeth in the lead they started up. Before they had climbed fifty feet the path became quite easy to follow. In fact, it showed the hand of man in its construction.

It was a gradual incline, extending along the face of the bluff, becoming wider and wider as they mounted upward. There were marks of great chisels where slabs of the soft rock had been split off, and while still a hundred feet or more from the summit, the adventurers reached a place where the ancient constructors of the road had used the waste material to build a substantial wall, four feet or more in height, along the outer edge. Here the way was broad enough for four men to walk abreast. The mortar which held the stone in place was still as hard as adamant. The rocks themselves, in fact, instead of the mortar, had crumbled with age.

"What do you think of such engineering as this?" demanded Ford.

"It is wonderful!" declared Keeth. "This must have been built three hundred years ago—possibly at a still more ancient date—yet the best work of civilized peoples today cannot surpass it. What giants those old Incas must have been, for they had few tools to aid them. This was all done by sheer bodily strength. They had no hoisting apparatus."

"Hand do you mean to say them Hinjuns did this?" cried Fitch.

"They certainly did," replied the engineer. "Probably the road was built about the time that Pizarro conquered the country."

Fitch shook his head over it.

"They must 'ave been a deal different from the niggers Hi've been used to," he said.

They were still more astonished when they had gone some rods further. On rounding a corner in the precipitous wall they found that the ancient workmen had tunneled a spur of rock to reach the summit of the cliff. The tunnel was a dozen yards in length and opened out upon the plateau on top of the bluff. And right before the mouth of the tunnel were the ruins of several stone houses, built against the side of the mountain.

"An ancient town—almost like the cliff dwellings I've seen in Colorado," declared Keeth. "Jose told us nothing about this. I wonder how far we are from the town of the Indians among whom he was a captive? I only hope——"

He broke off with a startled exclamation. On the verge of the cliff, a few rods from the old tunnel, was the figure of a woman. She stood in a listening attitude, but with her face turned away from the white men. Evidently she had heard their voices, but had not discovered from which direction there were approaching.

She was an Indian girl—almost a child in appearance—as lithe and graceful as a deer. Her skin was of a brilliant bronze hue, and a great mass of coal black hair hung to her waist; her head was guiltless of other covering. She was dressed in a tunic-like garment which fell below her knees and was open at the throat, displaying the full roundness of her bosom. A broad sash of strange texture and brilliant hue held the garment together at her waist. Her feet were shod with sandals, over her shoulder was slung by a

thong a quiver of arrows, and she held a short bow in her hand. In Keeth's startled vision she seemed a Diana in bronze.

He was speechless with amazement; but Ford and the trader, noticing the abrupt termination of their comrade's sentence, glanced up also. A sharp exclamation from the Englishman made the girl turn. She saw them, and wonder filled her face. Her great eyes, black as night, gazed deep into Keeth's own. Even in that brief instant he felt the magic of her glance.

But she remained motionless only a moment. Like a flash she fitted an arrow to her bow and a wild, bird-like call burst from her lips. The arrow was trained full at Keeth's breast and her brown fingers trembled on the string. He dared not move as she began to step lightly backward, her eyes still fixed upon him.

Suddenly Ford uttered a shout of warning. The girl, evidently forgetting the proximity of the cliff's brink, made a misstep. In a breath she had plunged backward into the abyss! The arrow flew high in the air and a piercing cry reached the ears of her horrified audience as she disappeared.

"My God!" cried Ford; "she's gone!"

"She'll be dashed to bits on them rocks below!" said Fitch, his usually ruddy face perfectly colorless.

But Keeth ran forward to the brink of the precipice. He expected to see the poor creature's mangled body bounding from rock to rock to the foot of the cliff. Instead of the horrible picture which his imagination had conjured, he beheld her lying in the fan shaped top of a stunted tree which grew out of a fissure in the cliff just below him. Her bow had fallen from her hand and she lay, seemingly stunned, upon this insecure resting place.

"Quick! knot that rope around me, under the arms," he commanded. "She may slip at any moment. Hang on the rope with all your might and don't let it chafe against the edge of the rock."

He divested himself of his coat and ammunition belt as he spoke, and in a moment was lowered over the brink. His feet scarcely gained a foothold on the rock, but Ford and the Englishman eased him steadily down. Occasionally a bit of rock gave way beneath his weight and went crashing into the gorge, and his hands were torn and bleeding before he reached the tree. The girl had not fallen more than twenty feet; but the shock had evidently deprived her of consciousness. She lay amid the broken branches with her eyes closed and head hanging limply over the abyss.

Resting one foot upon a protuberance on the face of the rock and the other on the limb of a tree, Keeth was able to raise her in his arms. She did not stir, and holding her tightly against his breast with his left arm, he fended himself off from the cliff with the other hand and shouted to his comrades to draw him up. He could no longer see where to place his feet and once or twice swung against the rough wall with cruel force. But he kept his own body between the cliff and his burden and she was not injured in the least. Before they reached the summit her eyes opened and she gazed up into his face.

"Keep still. Don't move," he said, and although she could not understand the words his voice evidently reassured her. She did not seem

frightened, nor struggle, as Keeth expected she would. Instead she lay passive in his arms, although she must have realized their danger.

Then, in a moment, Keeth felt Ford's hands on his shoulders. He was dragged upon the rock, still bearing the girl in his arms, and set her down safely upon her feet. His clothing was torn to rags. His hands were bruised and bleeding and there was a long gash on the side of his face. The girl darted away from them like a startled creature of the wood, evidently unhurt by her fall. But she did not go far, for, finding herself unmolested, she stopped and looked back.

"By Jove, Keeth! you're a sight," cried Ford. "But get into your coat and come on. We must make a break from here."

"What's the matter?" demanded Ronald, still a bit dazed.

"There's Indians about. They may be down on us any minute."

"Yes," said Fitch, "while you was a-riskin' your life for that 'ussie, we saw one of 'em among the rocks up there. We've got to run for hit!"

Keeth picked up his coat and started to put it on. But a cry from the girl caused him to look up. Out of the timber before them came a crowd of men armed with spears and clubs. They were Indians—of a lighter complexion than those usually seen in Peru—and were dressed in all the savage magnificence of an uncivilized people.

They were clothed in little but a short tunic and sandals, but there were brilliantly colored feathers in their hair and their arms and ankles were adorned with heavy bands of gold. They were fierce looking, keen eyed men, and without noticing the white men's superior weapons, marched solemnly toward them. Their huge spears were advanced threateningly and two or three had already fitted arrows to their bowstrings. At their head walked an old man with wrinkled, parchment-like face, dressed in a long white robe of finely woven llama wool.

"Great Scott, Keeth!" ejaculated Ford. "We're in for it. Shall we fight or run?"

Fitch had already unslung his rifle, and raised it to his shoulder; but Keeth roused himself in time to strike the weapon up.

"Not on your life, man!" he cried. "One of those fellows with the bows would spit you like a dried codfish. Keep still and let's see what they want. It will be time enough to fight when they try to disarm us."

"But they'll surround us in a minute," growled Fitch.

"Stand back to the tunnel here. They can't get behind us then," returned Keeth. "Keep your eyes open and don't let them get the better of us by a sudden sally."

The Indians had halted a few yards away and the old man advanced a step. He addressed some words to the white men which none of them understood. It did not sound like the dialects of either the coast or the mountain tribes with whom they had previously fallen in.

"What's that he's saying?" demanded Ford. "Can you understand the gibberish, Fitch?"

"Not Hi. Try them with Spanish, Mr. Keeth," suggested the trader. "Most Hinjuns understand that."

Keeth, thus adjured, exercised such knowledge as he possessed in that direction. The Indians' faces did not show that they had understood him. They waited in silence a moment and then the old man said something to his followers.

At once the spears were raised again and the bows bent.

"It's fight, I reckon," said Keeth, between his teeth. "Get ready to jump behind that wall yonder. If we can once get under cover we can wipe 'em out before they can send for reinforcements. Be sure your magazines are full."

But at this critical moment, when it seemed as though hostilities would at once begin, the girl, who had looked on in silence, suddenly darted between the hostile parties. She knelt gracefully at the old man's feet and began to speak. He listened attentively and as she continued he waved his hand to the men behind him and their spears were lowered again. The three white men looked on with anxious faces, uncertain as to the outcome.

CHAPTER VI.—GUESTS OR CAPTIVES?

THE girl was explaining to her people the incident which had taken place just before their appearance, and was pleading for the lives of the white men who had rescued her. Keeth was sure of this, and as he watched the old man's face he gathered hope. It kindled with love and pride as he gazed down upon the kneeling girl, and the young American shrewdly saw that through their effort in her behalf they had reached the old Indian's heart. It was probable that she was his daughter, or granddaughter, and there was little wonder that the stern man loved her. Barbaric as was her dress and ornaments, Keeth was forced to admit that he had never seen so lovely a creature.

The color came and went in her dark cheeks as she talked; her eyes shone; every motion was grace itself. The tightly fitting gown displayed every rounded curve of her form, and although she was so petite, the maturity of her figure was evident. She was a true daughter of the tropics.

But the affair was too serious to admit of much thought upon the girl's beauty. It was in her power, Keeth believed, to avert bloodshed, and he prayed fervently that she might be successful. The fierce looking men who were gathered in the background could not be driven back by one discharge of the rifles. They would fight till the last one dropped; and if blood was shed and he and his comrades *should* be finally captured, Keeth knew that they would suffer the greater punishment.

Finally the old man lifted the girl to her feet. With her hand in his he advanced toward the three white men and again spoke to Keeth. The intonation of the language was pleasant to the ear; there were few harsh sounds in it. But as far as Keeth was concerned it might have been Choctaw. He couldn't understand a syllable. The old man talked earnestly, pointed to the white men, then to himself and his companions, and waved his hand to include the surrounding territory. Keeth guessed that he was declaring the fact that he and his people were the only rightful possessors

of the country thereabout, and that the white men were trespassers. Possibly he was inquiring as to their business in the mountains. So, as best he could, Keeth replied in Spanish, hoping that the old fellow could understand his very pacific speech. But if he did, he gave no sign.

Instead, he uttered another long harangue, and Keeth began to feel that they might stand there for a week and talk without understanding each other. But here the girl came to the rescue. When the old man ceased she looked to him for permission, and as he gravely bowed, she tripped timidly to Keeth's side. She laid her hand upon his rifle and pointed to the guns of his companions. Then waving her hand for the waiting Indians to approach she showed that he and his friends were to give up their rifles and go with her people.

"They want to disarm us; evidently they know something about the destructive power of these guns," said Keeth, speaking to his comrades. "What do you think about it?"

"Hi say don't give hup the guns," exclaimed Fitch. "Hif they know hennything about 'em they'll shoot us, if they get 'em in their 'ands."

"Not if we unload them and keep the ammunition," returned Keeth. "It's very necessary that we should not arouse their anger. It is likely that there are plenty more of them not far from here. We do not know this country and they do. We are in a ticklish position."

"Can't we make a break for it, beat them off for a while, and get to that bridge after dark?" asked Ford. "Once across that, we could cut the log off, and then they, nor nobody else, could follow us."

"Well, Kinsale, if we tried to use our guns, how long do you suppose it would be before we were spitted on some of those ugly looking spears? I, for one, don't wish to attempt it," Keeth declared.

"But it hain't sense for us to give hup the guns," cried Fitch.

"Well, we've got our revolvers. I don't believe they know that these little things in our belts are dangerous. Their primitive knowledge of firearms was probably handed down to them from their forefathers. The making of firearms was not a fine art in the days of Pizzaro and his brave *conquistadors*. Let's slip the cartridges out of the magazines and let 'em have the guns. What say?"

"Well, you're the captain," said Ford slowly. "Pocahontas yonder seems to have taken a fancy to you, and maybe she'll see that the old graven image, nor her bare legged countrymen, don't hurt us. Here goes!"

He removed the cartridges from his rifle and held it out toward the savages. One of them stepped gravely forward and received it. Keeth followed suit; but Fitch gave up his very unwillingly.

"Hi tell you we'll see the time we'll wish we 'adn't done it," he growled.

When the rifles were in their hands, the Indians fell in behind the three white men, whom the old man beckoned to follow him. The girl walked by his side.

They marched into the forest which covered the mountain side. There was a broad path cut through the timber, leading straight up the slope. For

nearly a mile they remained in the shadow of the wood. Then they came out upon a broad plateau. Great fissures opened in the rock in all directions, and they had to pick their steps with care around boiling springs and holes from which clouds of sulphurous steam escaped.

"Nice country, this," said Ford, in disgust.

But Keeth glanced about him with appreciative eyes. He saw unmistakable signs of the richest mineral deposits.

They were nearly an hour in crossing the plateau. Then they descended through a narrow ravine, which turned and twisted like a snake, and suddenly, without warning, came out into a most luxuriant valley. The white men could not suppress exclamations of surprise at the view which met their eyes.

A long, gently undulating stretch of prairie lay before them. It was surrounded on all sides by unbroken cliffs. As far as they could see, the opening through which they had entered the miniature paradise was the only entrance to it. At its widest point it might have been three miles broad. There were great patches of luxuriant grass and here and there small gardens. There were three or four groups of houses, but by far the larger number were just at the left of the ravine through which they had come, and stood in a rude circle about a great, flat roofed structure which covered surely an acre of ground.

All the houses were of gray stone, without the least ornamentation. They looked as stern and forbidding as the cliffs which surrounded the valley. A little stream, like a crinkled, silver ribbon, crossed the prairie and disappeared at the base of one of the towering cliffs. Herds of llamas were grazing in the meadows; but no other animals were visible.

The old man and the girl led the way toward this nearest group of dwellings. As they approached, the people began to swarm out. But although they were evidently very curious regarding the three white men they stood respectfully aside at a motion of the old man's hand. Evidently he was a power in the tribe.

In a few minutes they reached the center of the little town, where stood the great building. Its front was a vast porch, the mighty roof upheld by rudely graven pillars, and before the porch, in the center of what might be termed the plaza, was a broad, low altar. The armed escort went at once into the main building (the temple, Keeth decided); but the old man and the maiden led their guests to a row of small houses just in front of the principal entrance. The man opened the door of one, and motioned Ford and Fitch to step within; but when Keeth tried to follow them, he waved him back and pointed to a somewhat larger house beyond.

Keeth hesitated; he did not fancy being separated from his friends. But Ford, who saw his hesitation, said:

"Go ahead, Ronald. We're in for it now, and might as well go the whole figure. His Nibs evidently thinks you are a great chief and you'll get better treatment than we. I wouldn't mind taking dinner with that girl myself."

"If anything happens, fire your pistol," Keeth said, in a low voice, and

then suffered himself to be led to the other dwelling. He found that it consisted of but one room; nevertheless it was light and airy. The windows were mere slits in the thick walls; but the door was a heavy wooden one, hung upon roughly wrought hinges of some kind of metal—just what he could not decide.

He was left to himself but a few minutes, and then a tall woman entered with a jar of water on her head and a pile of garments over her arm. She placed the water on the floor and laid down the garments. Then, bowing deeply; but without looking at him, she went out.

"Good!" thought Keeth. "A chance for a bath and something better than these rags, I hope, to put on. I wonder if the other boys will fare as well?"

But when he came to look the garments over he was a little doubtful about donning them. There was a shirt of finely spun llama wool, cut very low in the neck and sleeveless. It clung close to his body and reached half way between his waist and his knees. The tunic of cured skin (probably from the same useful animal) was likewise sleeveless and fell scarcely lower than the shirt. There were sandals, too—and queer enough they were. The soles were covered by a series of small scales of metal, and upon examination he found that metal to be gold!

"Talk about the riches of the Incas!" he gasped, when he made this discovery. "Why, these people don't know the value of the stuff."

But he was a sight when he was dressed!

"Won't Ford guy me!" he thought, as he tried to see his manly proportions as he stood in the light from the window. "But I can't wear those tattered and torn clothes I had on. Then, I might offend my entertainers if I refused to wear these."

At that moment there was a gentle rap at the door. He turned about and hastened to throw it open. The girl who had already so well proved her friendliness for him and his comrades stood without, and the tall woman, who was evidently a servant, was with her.

They entered, and the girl, taking a small jar from the woman's hands, approached him. She smiled up into his face and touched the wound on his cheek and pointed to his bruised hands. Removing the cover of the jar she began to bathe his wounds with its contents. It was an ointment which gave relief at once as she rubbed it gently in with her fingers. Keeth thrilled beneath her touch and felt himself blushing furiously. Somehow he couldn't make himself look upon her as merely an ignorant savage, and felt vexed with Ford because he had laughingly referred to her as "Pocahontas."

When she had gone the woman spread a cloth upon the floor and brought an abundant supply of food. There was some boiled meat—Keeth thought it probably kid—with vegetables not unlike mealy potatoes, and cakes of coarse flour. There was also a jar of liquor which, although of a rather pungent odor, was not unpleasant to the taste. He made a hearty repast, and when he had finished saw by the waning light that it was almost night.

He was left undisturbed until it was quite dark. Once he heard the loud

clangor of brazen cymbals from the direction of the temple, and the hum of many voices in the courtyard. But after a while the concourse of people dispersed and then there came a commanding knock upon his door. He opened it. Two gigantic Indians, armed with their ever present spears, stood outside and beckoned him to come with them. His belt was buckled around his waist beneath the tunic, and he felt of the butts of his revolvers to make sure they were in place before he obeyed. Then he stepped forth and was led toward the temple porch.

Before the door the armed men were relieved by a priestly looking Indian in a long white robe, who motioned Keeth to follow him. He carried a torch, which lit the labyrinth of passages through which he guided the white man. Finally they halted before a heavy door and his guide rapped. Keeth was sure that they had descended some distance beneath the level of the ground, yet the air in the passages was cool and sweet. These wonderful people had some knowledge of ventilation.

A voice—a voice which he recognized—replied to the knock. The guide touched the door and it swung inward. He motioned Keeth to step within, and when he had done so the door immediately closed and the young man found himself in a long, gloomy apartment, the high roof of which was upheld by sculptured columns. At the further end of the room a single lamp, hanging by chains from the roof, shed a dim glow upon a stone table. At the table sat the old man whose acquaintance he had already made.

Keeth walked slowly down the room and came at length to the table. The light revealed the brown face of the patriarch, with all its innumerable wrinkles. But despite his appearance of extreme age the eyes glowed brightly in the half darkness. Keeth found himself strangely attracted by those eyes. They seemed to scrutinize his very soul and hold his own gaze captive.

For a few moments there was silence between them. The old man was looking his visitor over and a little smile curled the corners of his mouth as he noted his fine proportions, now so well displayed by the Indian dress. Upon the table before him were some rolls of what looked like parchment, frayed and yellowed by time. Keeth saw that they were covered with markings in various colored dyes, or inks, and they seemed like ancient manuscripts.

Suddenly the old man spoke, and instead of the unintelligible tongue which he had previously used, he said, in the purest of Castilian, yet with an accent which sounded strange to Keeth, accustomed as he was to the speech of the South American Spaniard:

"Senor, who art thou, and whence comest thou? Why dost thou seek to penetrate the fastnesses of these Sierras which have so long been the refuge of my people?"

CHAPTER VII.—THE FIAT GOES FORTH.

KEETH was astounded. Upon the occasion of his first meeting with the aged Indian the latter had not made even a sign which led him to believe that he understood Spanish. He now stood dumb before him.

"Speak, senior," said the Indian, somewhat sternly, "What dost thou seek?"

Then the young man found his voice. He realized that he had a very delicate task before him. It would never do to tell the entire truth. The principal reason for the presence of his friends and himself in the mountains must remain hidden.

"We had lost our way," he said, bowing respectfully to his interrogator, "when you and your people found us. We entered the mountains many leagues to the south of here." He stretched out his hand in what he supposed to be the right direction. "Our guide fell from the cliff at the three pines, where the tree is laid across the canyon, and was drowned."

The old man inclined his head to show that he knew the spot.

"We climbed down the bluff to find his body and were unable to get back. Therefore we pursued the path by the river's edge until we found the road to the summit of the cliff, made by your people."

"Built by our fathers," murmured the Indian.

"Then, senior, you know how we came suddenly upon the girl, your daughter——"

"Not my daughter, stranger," interposed the old man gently. "My son's child. I am an old man, senior—an old, old man. I have been a priest of my people since my youth. But how camest thou in these Sierras? Who was thy guide?"

"An Indian," replied Keeth.

"His name?"

"Manuel was all the name we knew him by."

"It is not an Indian name," said the old priest quietly.

"No, senior. He probably was named by the Spaniards."

A cloud crossed the other's face. "And, senior, art thou not a Spaniard?"

"No. I am of a different nation. I am an American."

"We have no knowledge here of nations and peoples," said the old man sadly. "The world is large, senior?" He asked the question with childish curiosity.

"Very large, indeed," replied Keeth.

"And our mountains—these mighty peaks—are but a small portion of it?"

Again Keeth replied affirmatively.

"Then why do you come here, senior?" Why do you seek to disturb the unfortunate children of the Incas?"

The old man's face flushed, and he rose suddenly to his feet. "We have been conquered. The brutal Spaniards drove our fathers into these fastnesses ages ago, senior. They lusted for gold—for treasure. Why dost thou, and thy companions, come here?"

"It is not of our own choice that we are here," replied Keeth pacifically.

"Not *here*—no! But you came into our country—you seek out the hiding places of my unfortunate people. Dost thou lust for gold, too?"

Keeth was silent. He did not know how to reply to the old priest's vehement query.

"You are not a Spaniard, señor—I can believe it, for I can scarce understand your speech. The knowledge of the Spanish tongue has been handed down from priest to priest since our fathers came into these mountains to escape their conquerors. We are all that are left—this handful of my people—of the true descendants of the Incas. We have kept ourselves free from contamination of the Spanish. We await the time when Quesalcoatli shall return and reëstablish his people in their former power."

He dropped the Spanish, and with hands clasped before him broke out into a hymn, or psalm, in his own tongue. His face kindled, his body swayed backward and forward as he recited the rhythmic lines. Keeth stood in awe. Suddenly the other ceased, and coming quickly from behind the table, seized the young American by the wrist.

"Señor, answer me truthfully, by the God thou servest! Why dost thou come here? Is it for riches?"

"These mountains are full of mineral wealth," replied Keeth lamely.

"The Spaniards searched out our old mines, and our treasure houses," said the priest. "Gold is *their* God. We have no rich mines now. We only work those which were abandoned by our fathers. And their treasure caves are even hidden from their children, by the will of the gods. We have naught for thee, señor. Why didst thou come to disturb my people?"

"We will gladly go from you, oh, priest," responded Keeth. "Put us on the trail to Hualpa and we will never trouble you again—I swear it!"

"Nay, nay! That cannot be. My people would not hear to it," said the old man sadly. "Besides, I know not the place thou namest. We have no knowledge of the outside world. Our intercourse with the poor creatures, from among whom thy guide must have come, is very slight. Nay, señor; thou art here; here thou must stay!"

Keeth turned pale at the words. A prisoner for life among these people! Death were better.

"Thou palest, señor—yet thou art a brave man," said the priest. "Hadst thou not been I would have had no Imozene to bless my last days. I am an old man; soon I shall go to my fathers. But while I live thou and thy companions shall be well treated."

"But, priest," cried Keeth, "why should you keep us? It was no fault of ours that we fell upon this place."

"Señor," said the old man, shaking his head, "thou hast not told me all the truth. Thou mayest not be a Spaniard; but all men of thy fair skin esteem gold above all other possessions. If thou couldst thou wouldst bring into our mountains many like thee, to dig for treasure. This is our refuge." The old man drew himself up to his full height. "My people are brave. They have all the courage of the great Incas. But they cannot withstand the onslaught of thy people. They would fight for their homes till the last drop of blood was shed. But it would avail not. We cannot let thee go."

"I think you look for that which would not occur, señor," murmured Keeth. Yet he knew the old man spoke the truth. The time would come when white men would overrun the Andes and wrest from their serried sides the treasure which he believed was hidden there.

The priest suddenly seized both his hands and gazed deep into his eyes.

"Look upon me, my son!" he commanded, drawing Keeth's gaze, despite his will, to his own flaming eyes. "Thou shalt see what the result of thy search for gold wouldst be."

The young man fought against the influence which he felt was slowly overpowering him. His brain reeled; the columns upholding the dimly lit room seemed circling about him; he strove to withdraw his hands from the priest's grasp. But the will which enthralled him conquered all opposition. Slowly he sank back upon the rough bench beside the table. He fought no longer. He was passive in the priest's hands. The voice of the wonderful old man seemed to reach his dulled ear from a great distance.

"Look!" commanded the priest. "Behold the end of thy plans, oh worshipper of the God of Gold!"

Keeth's eyes slowly closed; and yet he saw. The wall of the cavernous room seemed like a cloud. It was a cloud in motion, rolling, writhing, changing form continually.

Suddenly it opened, and through the mysterious gloom a picture took shape and grew under his gaze. It was a precipice, and hanging from its verge by a slender thread of hemp was a man upholding the slight figure of a woman. The man's face was his own; the girl was the Indian maiden whose life he had saved that very day. Quickly this picture passed. He saw his companions and himself in the strange city of the descendants of the Incas. These first visions were indistinct; but as he looked those which followed were plainer.

He saw himself, and Ford, and Fitch, in what looked like a great arched cave. The walls glittered with gems. Heaps of golden bars, such as Jose Rodriguez had brought away from the Incas' treasure cave, flashed back the light of their torches. But always with them was the face of the girl, Imozene. No picture, as they passed in kaleidoscopic rapidity before his eyes, was complete without her.

Then the cloud writhed and twisted like a mortal in agony, and from out of it appeared visions of great rocks, seamed with glittering gold. He saw men mining the precious metal: first himself and his comrades; then others joined them. Houses and towns sprang up on the rugged plateaus of the mountains. The miners increased. And then he saw the peaceful valley of the Indians again—but oh, how changed! The light on this picture was dim, but he beheld the prostrate forms of dead men, and pools of blood, and fearful strife. The miners were battling with the ancient occupants of the valley.

He saw himself fighting in the ranks of the victorious white men. He gave and received blows. The din of battle was in his ears. Then the awful carnage ceased. The valley was dotted with the bodies of the dead. There were no more of the children of the Incas to battle for their homes and altars.

Yet the man whom he recognized as himself fought on. He was opposed by but one enemy—a figure so slight, so ethereal, that it evaded his fierce

onslaughts, and for a long time escaped his vengeance. It was covered with a mantle and its face he could not see. But at length his sword clove his enemy through. He pulled the dripping blade from the inert body and waved it over his head in triumph. But, as the body of his foe fell, the mantle came away from the face and it was revealed. It was the white, dead face of the girl, Imozene!

Keeth shrieked aloud at the awful sight. He struggled with unseen hands; he fought for breath. And then, of a sudden, he found himself lying in the old priest's arms, who held a cup of some liquor to his lips.

"Drink!" he commanded, and as Keeth obeyed the old man said: "What thou hast seen, remember. As thou seest, so shall it be if my people let thee go. Forget not, oh, rash man!"

CHAPTER VIII.—REVIEWING THE SITUATION.

It was some minutes before Keeth regained his composure. The nervous strain engendered by his involuntary trance had shaken him terribly.

"You are a wonderful man, priest," he murmured. "No one ever took my will from me before and showed me what was in his thought."

The old man smiled quietly. "Thou art mistaken, senior," he said. "I did not show thee that which I imagined. Think not I have played thee some child's trick. I know not what thou didst see. If the gods revealed to thee that which would follow thy rash purposes, be warned thereby. I am but their servant."

Keeth looked upon him earnestly. He understood something of the power which the old man had shown him. It was a form of hypnotism; but evidently what he had seen had not been suggested by the priest. Never could the old man have beheld that last awful picture and remained so calm. The American was greatly perturbed.

"Thou art a noble young man, stranger," pursued the priest. "Although we must detain thee, thou shalt have such courtesy as befits thy rank; thy companions, too, shall be well treated. I shall esteem it an honor to take thee into my own household; but now thou wilt return to the house where thou art lodged." He struck a sharp blow upon a brazen gong with a little hammer, and the priest who had guided Keeth through the temple appeared, and beckoned him to accompany him.

They passed swiftly through the silent corridors once more, mounted the long flights of stone steps, and at length reached the porch. Here the two waiting guards conducted him back to his house.

The heavy door was closed, but it was not barred. He could have gone out at any time, for he doubted if a watch was set upon his movements. But it would be of no use to leave the town. There was only one way out of the valley, and without doubt that way was well guarded. The lack of sentinels assured him that his captors considered escape absolutely impossible.

He found a pile of robes at one side of the room, and after arranging this bed lay down and slept soundly till morning. He was awakened just before light by a terrible clangor on the plaza, and springing from his couch ran to

the window. A great crowd of Indians were gathered before the temple, but it was still so dark that he could not see what was going on. So, after a moment's hesitation, he opened his door and slipped out.

The sky in the east was aglow with the rising sun, but as yet it had not appeared above the rugged cliffs which shut in the valley. Here it was still dark. He could see the people thronging into the open court before the temple. There must have been nearly a thousand of them—men, women, and children. The noise which had awakened him was made by two white robed priests, standing at either end of the porch, beating great gongs which they held in their hands.

Soon a procession appeared at the entrance of the temple, and the gongs ceased. But the priests leading the procession had small cymbals which they continued to clash most noisily; but these tiny cymbals gave out a high, shrill note not at all displeasing to the ear.

The priests marched slowly out upon the porch, two by two. Those who had no cymbals swung metal dishes of burning incense which filled the whole place with its pungent odor. The priests filed down the steps and arranged themselves about the altar; and then the old man appeared. An attendant led forward a kid, and it was seized and thrown upon the altar, on which a pile of fuel had already been laid.

The high priest held the struggling animal down with his left hand, raising a huge bronze knife aloft in his other. The people chanted in their musical tongue, while the light increased in the sky and the shadows stole away from the valley.

Suddenly the sun appeared. It shot up from behind a peak of the mountain and its first beam rested full upon the face and figure of the high priest. The chant changed to a shout and the knife was plunged into the throat of the sacrifice. Another attendant ran with a blazing torch, and in a moment the flames from the pile on the altar were flashing skyward. The voice of the concourse of Indians rose like the deep, full notes of an organ. The chant was the most solemn thing to which the American had ever listened.

Then they dispersed, and Keeth went back to his place, wondering exceedingly.

After his breakfast had been brought him and he had eaten it, he started out to find Ford Kinsale and Bob Fitch. Nobody molested him and he easily discovered the house in which they were lodged. He saw that the door was open and looked within. His friends were still at breakfast, sitting cross legged on the floor and evidently enjoying their meal extremely.

"There's one thing about it, Fitch," Ford was saying, "these bare legged heathens don't intend to starve us."

"Mabbe they're fattening us hup for to sacrifice us," responded the Cockney gloomily.

"Nonsense!"

"Ye can't tell, sir. Hi 'ad a cousin—a sailor 'ee was—an' 'ee was wrecked among the South Sea cannibals. 'Ee said 'ee was never treated better in 'is life, as regarded eating."

"Oh, get out! These people aren't cannibals. Hullo! here's one of 'em now."

Ford glanced up sideways at Keeth standing in the doorway. He didn't recognize him until his eyes reached his face, and then he sat stock still, with a bowl of something in one hand and a cake in the other, and stared in round eyed amazement. Fitch's attention was attracted also by his companion's long silence.

"W'y, Hi'm blest if it hain't Mr. Keeth!" exclaimed the trader.

"Of course it is," responded Keeth, in some disgust. "What's the matter with you, Ford? Don't be an idiot!"

But Ford dropped his eatables and fairly rolled on the ground in the excess of his hilarity.

"Oh, oh, oh!" he shouted. "Just look at him, Fitch! 'The White Chief of the Incas!' Oh, this is rich, Keeth. Won't you be burnt a deep, rich brick red if you go dancing around in those togs? You look like a Scotch broad sword dancer, you do. What you going to do? Marry Poca-hontas and settle down with these people?"

Keeth couldn't help grinning himself.

"Get up and don't act so like a fool," he said. "I had to put on something besides those rags of mine, and this was all they had. I shall have to wear 'em till I can get my measurements to my tailor in New York and he sends me something different."

"That's nice," said Ford cheerfully.

"Don't laugh so loud, though," pursued Keeth. "Both you fellows may come to it yourselves."

"How so? Are they going to make us don their attire?"

"No; but what you've got on won't last forever."

"What do you mean?" demanded Ford, sobered at once.

"I mean," replied Keeth, "that our friend, the old priest, tells me that he is under the painful necessity of keeping us here the remainder of our natural lives. How does that strike you?"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Ford, grave enough now. "You don't mean that?"

"I certainly do. I had an interview with him last night and that was the outcome of it. He promises that we shall be treated well, but we shall have to stay here."

"Stay 'ere!" repeated Fitch, his pig-like eyes wide open. "Not if Hi know myself!"

"Them's my sentiments!" quoted Ford.

"That's all very well," said Keeth. "You needn't think I don't appreciate the situation, too; but merely saying we *won't* stay will not help us out of the difficulty."

"I didn't know but you had already promised to be his son in law," said Ford slyly.

"Come," said Keeth, his eyes flashing dangerously. "This is no time for fooling. It is a serious matter; but we must talk and move circumspectly. Jose Rodriguez got away from these same people; what man has done man

can do. We'll find a way to escape, too. But at present I think we had better seem to acquiesce in the priest's decision. I think because of what we did for the girl—who, by the way, is his granddaughter, not his daughter, Ford—he is inclined to be friendly to us; but how the rest of the Indians feel about it, I don't know. We'd best go easy."

"We'll go easy, fast enough, if we once get the chance to go at all," murmured Ford.

"Hif you think Bob Fitch is goin' to be shut hup in this bloomin' valley for the rest of his natural life, you're mistaken," said the Cockney. "But, as Mr. Keeth says, there hain't no use a-rushin' things. So, if hit's all the same to you, Hi'll finish my breakfast."

But Ford had lost his appetite and followed Keeth outside where they could talk together undisturbed. Sitting in the sun by the wall of the house, Keeth told him all that had occurred during his interview with the old priest.

"That old chap must be the very devil," was Ford's comment.

"He is a wonderful man," responded Keeth. "But there's nothing so very remarkable about the hypnotic power he displayed, although I never met the mesmerist before who could control me."

"But all that stuff you say you saw——"

"I've studied that out," interrupted Keeth. "I was dazed by it all last night, but I've been thinking about it this morning. He couldn't have seen what I did. If he had, he'd have acted differently. He couldn't have helped showing it."

"Then he didn't suggest the pictures which you thought you saw?"

"I suggested them myself. I saw what was in my own mind, or what was the legitimate outgrowth of the thoughts which filled my mind at the moment he placed me in the trance. He was more than half right when he said that if he let us go we would in the end destroy him and his people. On that plateau across which we came, and at other points in the mountains, I have seen sure signs of rich deposits of nitrate, and other minerals which would pay men well to look into. When once the riches of these upper Andes are known people will flock here, and that will mean death to this handful of an already down trodden people."

"Seems to me," said Ford gloomily, "that you're dreadfully tender hearted toward them. To my mind they'd kill us quicker than a wink if they thought it would benefit them any."

CHAPTER IX.—IMOZENE AND KEETH.

THAT day Keeth took up his residence in the temple as a guest of the old priest. The rear apartments were occupied by his household, including the grandchild, Imozene. The American felt some little diffidence in allowing his captors to lodge him so much better than his companions; but both Ford and the Englishman advised him to accept the priest's invitation.

"There's no use in making an enemy of the old fellow," said Ford. "We're getting good food and a decent place to sleep. If you can get anything better, why take it."

"Hand more than that, Mr. Keeth," added Fitch, "you may be hable to 'elp us by standin' in with the old chap."

"That's so, Keeth. Stroke his fur the right way, and make love to the girl. You may be able to get the whole crowd of us out, if you're sweet enough on her."

But Ronald Keeth made up his mind that that was one thing he would *not* do. The priest's granddaughter should receive as respectful treatment at his hands as though he had met her in a New York drawing room. Ford's insinuating remarks about his interest in her grated upon the engineer's finer nature. He could not look upon the sweet face of Imozene without remembering that moment of awful peril when they hung together over the gorge with only the frail hempen rope between them and death. How brave she had been! And how kind she was to him afterward, coming herself to anoint his wounds. No, he could not think of her lightly, and promised himself that neither by word nor look would he take advantage of her guilelessness.

He spent much time with the old priest, for that strange individual seemed to have taken a fancy to him. Beside, he was the only person about the temple with whom he could at first converse. The knowledge of their conquerors' language had been guarded very jealously by the priests of the Incas; his host told him that but one member of a generation was ever taught it.

But Keeth had a taste for languages himself, and before long he was rapidly picking up the dialect of these people. With the priest he always conversed in Spanish; but for several hours every day he was more or less in Imozene's society; and when two young folks who have no reason for absolutely hating each other are thus thrown together, they must find some medium of communication. Under the girl's tuition Keeth advanced in his study of the Indian tongue.

Imozene, though scarcely more than a child in years (she was about seventeen, as near as Keeth could figure from the Indian measurement of time), was a woman in thought and feeling. And as soon as they learned to understand each other she showed great curiosity in regard to the outside world. Many things he tried to tell her she could not understand—nor was it possible for him to explain what he meant, for her language had no words by which he might express his meaning. That the world beyond the confines of her own mountains was a vast place, full of wonderful things and wonderful people, was the fact which impressed her most. She was amazed that the white men, when they already had so much, should care to penetrate the fastnesses of the Andes for any cause whatever.

Keeth had in his pack a small map of Peru which he showed her and tried to explain its uses. She thought that the diagram represented the whole world, and when he told her that even that vast territory, of which her beautiful valley was but a tiny spot, was a very small portion of the globe, she scarcely believed him.

"Dost thou really mean that, my lord?" she asked, laying her hand on his arm and looking up into his face.

"It is even so, Imozene," he replied, the unfamiliar sounds falling from his tongue haltingly. "I would not tell thee what was not true."

She sighed a little and let her head fall so that the waving black hair hid her face. "I cannot understand why thou camest hither, my lord," she said. "Is there anything my poor people have which thy people have not? Have they not gold, and treasures?"

"Yes. Many of my people have riches of which thou hast never dreamed. But I am poor."

"Thou wilt want for nothing here," returned the girl simply. "My people count not gold as did those cruel men who came to our land so many, many years ago." She looked searchingly into his face again. "Thou art a warrior; thou art handsome; thou knowest—oh, so much? Thou art rich *here*."

"Thou wilt make me vain, Imozene," he said, laughing a little.

"Thou art not like the men of my tribe," she went on. "Thou art as much a man, yet thou art tender, and the red blood mounts to thy cheek like a woman's. Our men are fierce and wild. Is it because thy people are better than mine? It is not because thou art not brave; I know thy courage, oh, my lord."

"It is because we have learned more while the years have passed," said Keeth. "Our young men are not taught to fight and kill. They learn peaceful pursuits. Yet they can fight when there is need."

"And are there no warriors among them?"

"Yes, there are warriors. But all have not to be warriors to be called *men*."

"Here my people are ashamed of a man who is neither warrior nor priest. The women will not look at him. What do the women of thy land say to the men who do not fight? Do they not scorn them?"

"No, princess. It is not considered beneath them to dig in the gardens as the women do here."

Imozene shook her head in wonder. Then she raised her face suddenly and, looking into Keeth's eyes, asked:

"Are there beautiful women in thy land, my lord?"

"Yes."

"How do they look? Are they as beautiful as the men?" And she looked at him frankly.

"Thou hast too high an opinion of the men's beauty, oh, princess," replied Keeth.

"Thou and the man thou callest 'Ford' art as handsome as my own people. Thou art far handsomer than Gonnatzl, and he is my own cousin, and will be priest when my grandfather dies. But thy other servant—he is so round, and red, and fat!" and the girl laughed like a chime of silver bells over the thought of poor Fitch's personal appearance. "Now tell me of thy women, my lord. Are *they* beautiful?"

"Some of them are," responded Keeth hesitatingly.

"Are they as beautiful as I am?" she asked frankly. "Gonnatzl says I am beautiful; but perhaps thou dost not think so, my lord?"

Keeth laughed again, this time to hide his embarrassment.

"Thou art very fair indeed, princess," he said.

A little shadow rested on the girl's face. "But in thy country they are fairer?" she asked. "What are they like?"

Keeth drew from the leather case in which he carried the map a bent and dogeared photograph and showed it to her. The color left her face and her pretty teeth pressed her red lip till the color fled from that, too, as she bent over the picture.

"Is it the work of gods—or demons?" she asked breathlessly.

"Thy people have carvings and paintings on the walls of this temple," said Keeth. "My people make their pictures more lifelike. This is one thing we have learned in turning our backs upon war."

"But who is she? She *is* beautiful!" The admission seemed fairly forced from her lips.

Keeth looked at the noble, high bred face, so different from the dark, passionate living one beside it, and sighed. "It is my sister," he said.

The color flashed back into Imozene's cheeks and she smiled again. "And thou canst never see her again," she said slowly. "And she is so beautiful—much more beautiful than I. I never had a brother," she added, after a moment. "She must be sorrowful to lose thee, my lord—and thou to lose her."

Keeth bowed. The girl crept nearer and laid her little hand again upon his bare arm. The touch thrilled him and he started to draw his arm away and then hesitated, fearful that he might offend her. But he dared not look at her—for his own sake.

"Let me be thy sister in her place," she whispered softly. "I am sad for thee, my lord."

She leaned against him as he sat upon the stone bench and, after a moment, slid down upon the seat beside him. Keeth was forced to look at her and found her dark eyes running over with laughter.

"How do brothers show their love for their sisters in thy country, my lord?" she asked, glancing at him sideways out of her sparkling eyes.

In a flash Keeth had his arms about her and turned her face up to his. For a single instant their lips met. The blood suffused her cheeks, the laughter died out of her eyes and tears filled them instead, and she darted away from his side. For a moment she looked at him reproachfully and then turned and fled from the room, leaving him filled not alone with wonder at her action, but with anger at his own.

CHAPTER X.—A CRISIS.

KEETH could not understand how he had offended the princess so sadly; but that she *was* offended there could be no doubt. She had been so bewitchingly coquettish that he had broken the promise he had made himself when first she sought his society, and now paid the penalty for his unfaithfulness. For days together he scarcely saw her, and when he did, it was never alone. He had no opportunity to crave her forgiveness for his rash-

ness; though he could not understand why a simple kiss had so strangely affected her.

He thought upon it so much that finally he determined to ask the old priest something about the customs of the tribe in regard to the intercourse of the sexes. Possibly, he told himself, he had committed some crime against their social customs by kissing her; or perhaps kissing was an entirely unknown quantity among these Indians. Therefore he inquired of his host, so carefully that he would not suspect his reasons for asking.

The old man seemed delighted whenever Keeth showed any unusual interest in his people. He had grown fond of the young stranger during the weeks of his captivity, and seemed never tired of talking with him. And during a long and rambling résumé of the customs and laws of the tribe Keeth learned a very interesting fact. He ascertained that the kiss was a sign of betrothal, and that it was considered a great breach of etiquette for a man and woman to exchange such a caress unless marriage was contemplated.

To say that Keeth was troubled at this information is to put it very mildly. He understood now the change in Imozene's behavior. He had taken a liberty which a proud spirited girl could scarcely forgive, and he felt humiliated to the dust, despite the fact that he had done the thing unwittingly. From remarks the old priest let drop, he thought that it was his intention to betroth Imozene to her cousin Gonnatzl, who would be the head man of the tribe when he was gone. Keeth wondered what Gonnatzl would do if he learned of what had passed between the princess and himself.

He knew the young Indian. He had been among those who had attended the priest and Imozene the day Keeth and his friends had been brought to the valley of the Incas. He was a brawny, stern visaged savage—a noble looking man, though a bit surly in disposition. The engineer fancied that he looked upon him and his two companions in captivity with an unfriendly eye, as it was.

Two months had now passed since they had come among these Indians and the first opportunity for escape had not presented itself. Fitch was in a state bordering on desperation and Ford was in despair.

"You're taking it mighty easy, Keeth, up there with that old priest at the temple," complained Ford. "What d'ye suppose my house in Callao thinks of my being gone all this while? And I should think you would feel kind of funny about your own position. Do you intend to stay here forever?"

"Please don't be an idiot, Ford," returned the engineer. "If you can show me the merest chance for escape I'll try it with the rest of you. I can't *make* chances."

"No, nor you're not looking for them," declared Ford.

"Well, what can we do?"

"Hi tell you wot it is, young man," said Fitch seriously, "they're treatin' you so bloody fine hup there that you don't more'n 'alf care w'ether you get away or not. But me 'n' Mr. Kinsale do. We're goin' to do some-thin' desperate yet."

"I'm just as anxious to get away from here as you are," declared Keeth.
"But I'm not such a fool as to let these people see it."

"You manage to hide your anxiety well from them—and from us, too," interposed Ford.

"Hang it all, man! what can we do?" demanded Keeth, in disgust.

"Take a look around an' see wot this bloomin' valley looks like," suggested Fitch. "There's no use in sticking 'ere like toads hunder a toadstool. You get the hold feller's permission for us to tyke a look around. We'll see if there's only one way through them blessed cliffs."

So Keeth, spurred on by his friends, made the request known to the high priest. It was granted without hesitation, and the old man said he would send somebody with them, which last was not exactly to their taste; but they were not in a position to file objections. The guide selected proved to be the young man, Gonnatzl, and this displeased the engineer still more.

But the three prisoners could find no fault about the way in which they were treated. The people gazed upon them curiously as they traveled from place to place, it is true, but they were unmolested. The valley was about eight miles long and not over three wide at its broadest point. And as for escape through or over the cliffs—well, Keeth made up his mind before they had made the circuit of the place that unless a man had wings like one of those condors whose nests topped some of the most inaccessible crags, or enough dynamite to wreck half the mountain system of Peru, there was little chance of either.

The river—or more properly brook, during this dry season—crossed the valley from west to east. It spouted out from beneath an overhanging ledge and was augmented by half a dozen little rills which trickled through the valley or fell down the cliffs. It slanted across the meadows, at one point forming a little lake in which hundreds of wild fowl sported, finally disappearing in a wide crack under the base of the eastern cliff. This opening was scarcely five feet high, and showed by the slime which discolored the rock that during the rainfall the stream became no inconsiderable torrent.

"Where does the water go to, prince?" inquired Keeth of their guide.

"To the under world—to the abode of gods and demons, oh, white man," responded Gonnatzl harshly. "We had a prisoner once—it was not so many moons ago—who sought to escape the children of the Incas by following the bed of yonder stream," and he pointed solemnly to the mouth of the cavern.

Keeth started, but recovered his self possession instantly. Could this be Jose Rodriguez—and had he escaped through that forbidding entrance to what the Indian called the "under world"?

"And what happened to him, oh, prince?" asked the engineer.

"The gods sent a great rain and he never returned," replied Gonnatzl, simply. "When the banks of the river are full the waters tear through the rock as swift as a condor when it swoops upon its prey."

Keeth made no further comment, but when he and his friends had returned to the neighborhood of the temple, and were alone, he told them what Gonnatzl had let fall about a former prisoner.

"By Jove! that was Jose, sure," declared Ford.

"We may reasonably suppose so."

"And he went through that hole and never came back?"

The three white men looked at one another.

"Wot do you think of hit?" whispered Fitch hoarsely. "If that's the w'y Jose got hout it's the w'y *we* can get out."

"Let us be sure that the prisoner Gonnatzl meant *was* Jose," responded Keeth. "I'll try to sound the fellow further, or ask some of the priests. But we must not arouse their suspicions."

"It's not an inviting looking hole," said Ford reflectively.

"But if we're reasonably sure that Jose escaped by that means, you will risk it?" asked Keeth.

Ford was silent a moment, but Fitch did not hesitate.

"Hif you harsk *me* that, Mr. Keeth, Hi'll tell you mighty quick," he said doggedly. "Hi'm goin' to try it if there's the least show of getting hout alive. Bob Fitch 'as stayed among these 'eathen just as long as 'ee wants to. 'Ee's gyne for hennything."

"I shan't be behind you fellows," said Ford quietly. "Life is sweet, but liberty is sweeter. And there's no knowing when the apparent kindness of our friends here may change to something different. I don't like that Gonnatzl's eyé, and you say he's a high cockalorum in the tribe, Keeth?"

Keeth nodded, but he kept his suspicions of Gonnatzl's enmity to himself. There was no use in worrying Ford and Fitch further. But he firmly believed that the young man who, some day, would be at the head of the tribe, was anything but friendly toward them. He had a demonstration of this fact within a few hours.

That evening he had an opportunity of speaking again with Imozene for a few moments, although one of the women servants crouched in the corner all through the interview. He did not know how to broach the matter of their last *tête-à-tête*, although that lay nearest his heart; but he told her of the tour of the valley which he and his friends had made that day and asked about the captive of whom Gonnatzl had spoken.

"Ah, yes, I remember him, my lord," responded Imozene, with her head turned so that he could see only the profile of her face. She seldom looked at him now, and all the childish frankness and candor were gone from her manner. "He stayed with us many moons—but he was not like thee. He was of that nation who conquered our fathers in the days that are past."

"Gonnatzl said that he was swept into the cavern by the river," suggested Keeth.

"He was seen to go there, my lord," she answered. "The great rain which the gods sent carried him down—down to the abode of the gods. He was seen never more; but his spirit sometimes walks and wails about the river. It has been seen at night or early morning by the herdsmen. They will not go near the place except by broad daylight."

"So he was a Spaniard?" said Keeth. "He was not treated as kindly as are we, then?"

"Had Gonnatzl his way, my lord, you would be less gently treated. He does not like men with white faces, and says they are all alike," said Imozene softly.

"But thanks to you and your grandfather we receive far better treatment than we deserve," rejoined Keeth, with a smile.

"Ah, my lord," she said, raising her eyes to his for a moment, and he saw that they were full of tears, "we cannot know what may happen. My grandfather is old. Gonnatzl will succeed him and will then work his own will. And I—what am I but a weak woman? I can do nothing to save you. Beware of Gonnatzl, my lord!"

She looked at him with all her soul in her eyes and then ran sobbing from the room.

"Hang it!" thought Keeth, "the girl knows more than she tells. I believe that Gonnatzl already intends us some injury. We must risk that river bed at once, desperate as the chance appears. I feel quite confident that the prisoner they speak of was Rodriguez. I'll see Ford and Fitch the first thing in the morning, and we'll make the attempt tomorrow night if the fates be propitious."

But the morning brought a peril which was entirely unlooked for. He was awakened in his chamber at the rear of the temple by the beating of the brazen gongs. Every morning the priests performed some ceremony in homage to the rising sun; but Keeth knew by the uproar in the court before the temple that something of an unusual nature was afoot. He arose and dressed, although it was still quite dark. He had scarcely slipped on his tunic when his door was opened and two solemn faced priests beckoned him out.

He followed them in wonder to the porch of the temple. Not until he reached this place and saw the concourse of people and Ford and the trader each between two guards at one side of the porch did he suspect that they were in danger. The priests who had brought him gave him over to the care of two armed Indians and he was placed beside his comrades.

"What's up," asked Ford, in a whisper.

"I don't know anything about it. I'm just out of bed," replied Keeth, in the same low tone. "Is the old priest here?"

"Haven't seen him. That red rascal, Gonnatzl, seems to be the master of ceremonies."

"Hi believe they're goin' to roast us, an' 'ave a feast," said Fitch gloomily.

"I tell you they're not cannibals," declared Keeth. But he wished that the benign, if stern, face of the old priest would appear. He remembered that Imozene had warned him against her cousin only the night before. The situation looked serious.

"Have you got your pistols?" he inquired.

"Yes. And they're in good order, too," declared Ford grimly.

"Then if worst comes to worst we'll be able to put up a good fight," said his friend. "But wait for me to give the signal. I can understand what they say and you can't."

"Hif Hi see one o' them niggers comiu' for me with a toasting fork, I shan't wait for *you* to give the word to fire," declared Fitch mutinously. "Hit's ev'ry man for 'imself then, an' the devil 'elp the 'ndermost!"

The priests were grouped behind the prisoners on the porch. The people crowded the plaza before the altar, and Keeth observed, by the light of the torches, Gonnatzl and a group of warriors just below him on the broad steps. Suddenly the young Indian sprang out into the open space behind the altar and began to speak to the crowd. And as Keeth listened to the passionate words which fell from his lips he paled and grasped the handle of the revolver beneath his tunic, for Gonnatzl was proving all that Imozene had feared. He was inciting the people against the white prisoners, and was even decrying the leniency the old priest had shown them.

CHAPTER XI.—THE SIGN OF THE CURSE.

"WHAT does that red rascal say, any way?" whispered Ford, nudging Keeth with his elbow.

Keeth looked at his friend strangely.

"What's the matter with you? Speak up!" exclaimed Ford.

"You remember that mark on poor Jose's cheek that caused all his trouble?"

"Surely."

"Well, Gonnatzl is kicking because we have not been treated to the same delicate attention. He accuses our friend, the priest, of showing us unwarranted favoritism by not tattooing us before, and he demands that we receive 'the sign of the curse' at once."

Bob Fitch's hands sought the side pockets of his ragged coat where reposed his two revolvers.

"May has well be shot for a hold sheep has a lamb," he muttered.

"Be quiet, Fitch!" commanded Keeth. "Don't either of you make a move until I give the word. If the priest comes this may blow over."

But still the old man did not appear and Gonnatzl's words were evidently having their effect upon the assembled throng. The torches lit up the dark, fierce faces of the men in the front of the crowd, but the mass of the people were in the black shadow of the building which surrounded the plaza and only their outlines could be seen. The young prince's impassioned utterances were inflaming the warriors, who were without doubt his friends and supporters. Looks of hatred and malice were cast at the three prisoners, and it seemed as though the savages were ready to make a rush upon them.

Suddenly there sounded the shrill tinkle of cymbals within the temple. Keeth started and turned to his friends in excitement. He knew that the sound of the cymbals always announced the approach of the high priest at any ceremony. The sky in the east was already glowing with the approaching dawn. The torches burned dimly in the increasing light.

Gonnatzl evidently recognized the fact that his time was limited. His voice rose to a shriek and he threw his arms above his head in an ecstasy of rage.

"Curses on the white faced prisoners!" he shrieked. "Let them be branded with the sign of the curse!"

A hoarse shout answered him, and a number of the armed guards started forward. Gonnatzl wheeled and headed their charge up the temple steps. The prisoners drew back together and Keeth shook off the guards who had laid hold of him.

"Back to the wall, boys!" he exclaimed.

The confusion of voices swelled to a roar. The crowd swept up the steps like a breaker on a sea beach. Torches were thrown down and trampled under foot, and the half naked savages looked like fiends from the pit in the dusk of the early morning.

All the while the shrill note of the cymbals could be heard above the confusion. The old priest was advancing from the temple. He reached the entrance just as Gonnatzl and the foremost of the mob arrived upon the top step. His face, revealed by the light of the torches carried on either hand by his attendants, showed no emotion as he saw the hurlyburly on the temple porch. He advanced neither more swiftly nor more slowly than was his wont, but as he neared the end of the porch he gave a quick glance from the three white men at bay against the wall to the crowd of dark visaged Indians who had hesitated at his appearance.

He said no word, but at a wave of his hand the rabble sluuk back down the steps, and even the fiery young prince gave way before him. The babble of tongues died away and there fell an awed hush upon the assembly. The old man stretched forth his hands above the heads of his people, and at the sign the remaining torches were dropped and stamped under foot by their metal soled sandals. Immediately a low, solemn chant was begun by the priests and the concourse of Indians took it up. The light grew above the eastern peaks, and the ceremony in honor of the rising sun went on as though nothing had occurred to mar the repose of the occasion. Gonnatzl's revolt had been stamped under foot with the blazing torches.

When the usual sacrifice was burning on the altar the people quietly dispersed. The priests filed silently back into the temple, and their leader turned and spoke to Gonnatzl for a moment. Whatever he said did not please the young man, for he scowled darkly, and casting a malignant glance at Keeth and his friends, marched slowly away from the place.

The old man bowed to Keeth as he passed him.

"Have no fear, senor," he said in Spanish. "Inzalkl still rules his people."

But Keeth looked after him in doubt as he entered the temple. His step was slow and his hand shook with the palsy of age. He was not the same strong man he had been when first they had seen him. How soon would it be ere Gonnatzl should reign in his stead?

"Boys, we must get away tonight, if such a thing is possible," he whispered in his comrades' ears. "Go home and get your breakfasts. I'll come and see you this forenoon and we'll make our plans. Save what food you can from your meals today. It's better to run the risk of following that river bed than to go through such another experience as this."

"That's the most sensible thing you've said for many a long day, Mr. Keeth," declared Fitch, and he and Ford went off together, arm and arm.

Keeth went to his own apartment filled with conflicting emotions. They were to run a desperate chance indeed. If the cavern into which the waters of the brook flowed proved to be unavailable for purposes of escape, their treatment when they were recaptured would be far more severe than it had been. Even the old high priest, Inzalkl, would be unable then to save them from the wrath of Gonnatzl and his friends. And then, it was impossible to tell what danger lurked in the bed of the subterranean river.

"But it's the only thing to do," thought Keeth, pacing his room restlessly after breakfast. "I see no other way. The cliffs are unscalable; the only entrance to the valley guarded. Our only hope is that river, and if Jose Rodriguez was the prisoner who left the valley by that means—well, what man has done, man can do. But if it were not he—if it were some other unfortunate fellow—! Well, a man can die but once, and we had better die trying to escape than become veritable slaves of these savages."

He was about to go out and seek his comrades in misfortune when there came a timid rap upon his door. He opened it and found Imozene standing at the portal.

"My lord, I must speak to thee!" she exclaimed.

"What is it, princess?" he asked, taking her hands tenderly and drawing her into the room. "Why do you tremble so? What has happened?"

"My grandfather—the great Inzalkl——"

"What about him?" cried Keeth, half suspecting what her answer would be.

"He is stricken, my lord!" gasped the girl, beginning to sob. "He is dying."

"Not that! You are too easily alarmed, princess."

"He says himself he is dying," said the girl solemnly. "He knows, my lord. He calls for thee."

"I will go to him at once."

Keeth stepped to the door, but looking back he saw the drooping, pitiful figure of the girl leaning against the rough stone wall. He hesitated a moment and then went back to her side.

"I am sorry for thee, Imozene," he said gently. "I wish I might comfort thee."

"Thank you, my lord," she returned gravely. "I sorrow for thy sake as well as my own. Gonnatzl feels harsh toward thee—beware of him. If the great Inzalkl die thou and thy friends will fare ill. But hasten—he calls for thee again."

Keeth bowed and walked slowly from the room. He was sufficiently familiar with the temple now to find his way to the old priest's apartment. There were several white robed attendants hovering about the old man's couch. Immediately upon seeing the white man enter he motioned the others to leave him and the room was soon cleared.

"Senor," he said, speaking almost in a whisper, "the hand of death is on me. I arose in my weakness this morning and saved thee from the young prince Gonnatzl; I cannot save thee again. Thou art in danger here. My people have had poor crops this season; they lay it to the wrath of the gods because I have had thee as my guest and have refused to enslave thy servants. When I am dead, senor, all will be different here. Gonnatzl will have no mercy, I fear me.

"I have sent for him. He is to espouse his cousin, little Imozene, and as she is thy friend perhaps I may lead him to show thee mercy after all. Yet," and the old man spoke more slowly and shook his head, "the young prince is not so eager to wed his cousin as he was. I fear me he will not treat her with kindness. If thou canst be of aid to her at any time thou wilt not hesitate to offer her thy arm?"

"I am her servaut, oh, priest," replied Keeth, bowing.

"Farewell, then, white man. I can say no more—I can do no more. My life is slipping away from me. The things of this world seem small to me now, oh, son." For a moment his eyes became fixed upon Keeth's face. Their dulness passed away and something of the fire came into them which his guest had seen on that first night when the wonderful occult power of the priest was displayed. But now it was not Keeth's soul which was enthralled. The limbs of the old man grew rigid, his eyes burned like dull coals; slowly his lips opened and he spoke, but in a voice which the listener scarcely recognized.

"Art thou there, my son? Listen! Fear not the path thou shalt tread. Death is not before thee—fear not." He was silent a moment, his face growing more rigid. His lips moved stiffly. "I see—I see what thou canst not. Ah, my people! my people! They are doomed. Thy people, oh, son, shall sweep aside the children of the Incas as chaff before the thresher's fan. But Imozene—my little Imozene! Care for her, son, I charge thee—care for her!"

His words became inaudible, though his lips still moved. Keeth placed his ear close to them, but could distinguish nothing. The rigid lines slowly relaxed. His breath came more easily and the old priest sighed and turned his face to the wall. He had fallen peacefully asleep and Keeth stole from the room.

CHAPTER XII.—INTO THE TUNNEL'S MOUTH.

WHEN Keeth arrived at the abode of his friends he was just in time to witness a spectacle which, despite the serious matters occupying his mind, forced a laugh to his lips. Ford Kinsale and the trader had been reduced, during their captivity, to little else than rags for clothing, and at last had been forced to abandon their European garments and don the tunic of their captors. They had continually made fun of Keeth for wearing the Indian costume; but now the laugh was on the other side. The engineer was a picture of manly beauty beside his two friends.

Ford was a muscular fellow, but he was lean and his long shanks stuck

out of the skirts of the tunic like a pair of broom sticks. And as for Fitch—well, he *was* a sight! He had lost none of his corpulency while in captivity, and the llama skin tunic fitted him as tightly as his own cuticle. His waist line had disappeared some years before and his aldermanic proportions were much *en evidence* as he strutted about the room.

The first intimation he and Ford had that they were observed was a burst of laughter from Keeth in the doorway.

"Hullo! *you* there?" exclaimed Ford, in disgust. "What sort of ballet dancers do we make?"

"Oh, you're out of sight!" Keeth declared, between his chuckles. "If you could only see yourselves! Fitch, you look like a keg of ale on stilts."

"Ho, ho! that's a good one on you, Fitch!" roared Ford, in delight.

"And you look like a superannuated clothespin," added the engineer, turning to his chum with a broad grin.

"Aw—g'wan! I bet I don't look any worse than you," responded Ford, though with less hilarity.

"I don't know about that," said Keeth. "Somehow your bones—you are awfully bony, Ford—project out into the ambient atmosphere really more than they should. You need upholstering, my son."

"Well, you cyn't say that of me, Mr. Keeth," interposed Fitch.

"No; it's a pity you couldn't turn over some of your superabundance of flesh to poor Ford, and thus even things up. Oh, you two are sights!"

"My ancestors were used to kilts," said Kinsale reflectively. "It's a pity if I haven't enough Scotch blood in me to carry off a little thing like this. I don't believe I look as bad as you say, Ronald."

"It's lucky you're so unbelieving, old man," returned Keeth coolly; "for if you really knew how badly you look, I shouldn't be able to get you outside the door yonder. And it has become very necessary that we *do* get outside," he added, more gravely.

"Why, what's up? Anything new?"

"The old priest is in a very bad way; in fact, he's dying," said Keeth.

"By Jove! you don't mean it?"

"Hour cake's dough, sure enough!" exclaimed the Englishman.

"We are in a bad box, there's no denying it," said Keeth, in a low voice.

"We must get away this very night. Will you risk it?"

"Hi've said Hi would, an' H'im just as ready now as Hi was then."

"Of course we'll go," said Ford. "Think we want to stay here and have that Gonnatzl roast us on the altar yonder some fine day? I suppose you'll try the river bed?"

"That seems to be our only chance—and to tell you the truth, boys, I think *that's* a mighty slim one."

"If Rodriguez ——" began Ford.

"We're not positive the man whom they say was lost there was Jose," interrupted Keeth. "But however that may be, I cast my vote for trying it this night."

"Hi'm with you," responded Fitch quietly.

Ford nodded. "I shan't stay here alone," he said. "Fitch and I

got a package of grub stored up yonder—some dried meat and cake. We'll need torches, won't we?"

"Yes; and our blankets. I'll get the torches," returned Keeth, and forthwith ensued a long discussion of ways and means. Each suggestion was examined in detail, and when Keeth departed every possible contingency had been thought of and planned for.

He remained in his own chamber till noon, and then, thinking the time opportune, seized an armful of torches from a pile in one of the corridors near by, wrapped them in a rug and carried them to one of the side entrances of the temple. Ford was on the lookout for him and came across the court and carried the innocent looking bundle to his quarters. On his way back to his apartment Keeth passed the young prince, Gonnatzl, near the door of the high priest's chamber. Gonnatzl had evidently been in to see the old man; but what effect the dying Inzalkl's pleading had had upon the hot headed fellow Keeth could not guess, for the prince passed him with averted face.

He heard nothing from the dying priest during the afternoon. He tried to sleep, knowing that if all went well he would be upon his feet all the coming night; but his mind was so troubled by thoughts of Imozene, and of the danger menacing his friends and himself, that it was impossible. The impassioned words of the old priest—the last he would probably ever hear from his lips—still rang in his ears:

"Ah, my people! my people! They are doomed. Thy people, oh, son, shall sweep aside the children of the Incas as chaff before the thresher's fan. But Imozene—my little Imozene! Care for her, son, I charge thee—care for her!"

Keeth repeated the words over and over. What had the old man meant? By his wonderful occult power had Inzalkl looked into the future and really seen some great danger menacing his granddaughter? Of Keeth he declared he should escape death. *Did he know?*

It was impossible for the American to sleep while these and like thoughts were rioting through his brain. He paced the confines of his narrow room like a caged beast. The afternoon waned and the night began to fall. The narrow streak of sunlight which crept across the floor from dawn to dark disappeared, and through the window he saw the stars come out in the still glowing sky. From the bustle and confusion outside he judged that a great many people had gathered about the temple. The news that the old Inzalkl was [near death had gone out among his nation, and from all parts of the valley they had gathered.

Suddenly the great brazen gongs at the door of the temple began to beat slowly. Their rhythmic throbbing filled the remotest corridor with clangorous sound. A hush fell upon the throng without. Keeth listened at his door, his heart beating tumultuously. What was the meaning of the jarring notes? Had the end come? Had the old man already passed away?

But as he listened another sound reached his ear. It was a faint sobbing just without the portal. He unbarred the door and swung it back, and there, in the gloom of the corridor, lying on the threshold, he beheld a pitiful little heap, shaken by a tempest of sobs.

"Imozene!" he cried, and in an instant caught her up in his arms. She hid her face on his shoulder and he felt the heaving of her bosom against his own breast.

"What is it—tell me, my child?" he said, bearing her in his arms to the stone bench beneath the window.

"He is dead," whispered the girl, not offering to disengage herself from his embrace; but her sobs ceased.

"Inzalk!"

"Yes, my lord. The gongs beat out the sad intelligence to my waiting people. Dost thou know what it means to thee—and me?"

"To me it means danger, oh, princess, if Gonnatzl now reigns. But to thee it means sorrow for the loss of a kind friend and counselor. Thou wilt reign over thy people with Gonnatzl?"

"Thus my grandfather intended. But it will never be, my lord."

"Why not?" demanded Keeth hoarsely.

Slowly the girl disengaged herself and sat upon the bench beside him.

"Had I the key to the treasure cave of our fathers—the cave lost to our people by the will of the gods so long ago—Gonnatzl would not wed me. He has so declared. I shall never wed, my lord. I am alone—alone!"

Her head slowly drooped until her forehead rested against the cold stone. Her hair hid her features from her companion, and again the passionate sobs shook her frame.

Keeth sprang to his feet and leaned above her. Once he put out his arms as though to gather her again within them. But he fought down the temptation.

"God knows I've done her harm enough," was his bitter thought.

"I cannot save thee, my lord. Gonnatzl will have his vengeance on thee. I shall see thee die—and then die myself! Before another sun thy friends and thyself will fall before my cousin's rage."

"We shall not!" exclaimed Keeth defiantly. "Oh, princess, weep not for us. We shall escape him."

"Then the gods must shield thee," she said simply. "Imozene cannot."

She still lay hopelessly upon the bench, her body shaken by her sobs. Keeth was torn with conflicting emotions. Should he fly alone from the temple, or should he take her with him? He believed she would go without protest. If they escaped she need never return to the wilderness; if not—well, they would die together. He knew—aye, he confessed it to himself with shame, yet with a strange exultation—that he loved her. He loved this woman—this half savage creature; in all the barbarism of her nature and surroundings, *he loved her!*

Yet because this was so he could not do what inclination prompted. He could not sacrifice her. Should they fly together and be captured, what horrible punishment might not be meted out to her by her fanatical people?

He glanced back over his shoulder for a last glimpse as he crept like a thief to the door. The little heap of barbaric finery still lay upon the bench, and the last sound he heard as he stepped so softly into the corridor was a choking, despairing sob from behind the curtain of her glorious hair.

Keeth groped his way to the side door of the temple. No one opposed his exit. The side court was deserted. All the people who had thronged into the town had crowded into the plaza before the porch. With swift steps he made his way to the lodgings of his friends and aroused them.

"What! shall we start this early?" demanded Ford.

"At once," returned Keeth. "The old man is dead. We do not know when the blow may fall upon us. Gather up the torches and the food and come."

They did as he commanded, and like three ghosts, though it must be confessed that poor Fitch was a very corpulent spirit, they flitted through the deserted town and reached, without mishap, the open country. A dark mass of cloud was slowly gathering in the west, foreboding a storm. They went on through the oppressive silence to the river.

Suddenly Keeth halted and seized Ford's arm. "What's that, old man?" he demanded. "Your eyes are better than mine."

He pointed to something moving along the brook bed toward the cliff.

"Hit's a man," exclaimed Fitch.

"It's alive, whatever it is," said Ford uneasily.

"Hi've a good mind to give hit a bullet," declared the Englishman.

"Hit's one o' them bloomin' Hinjuns."

"Don't you dare!" cried Keeth hastily. "Want to call the whole crowd back there down on us? We'll follow him."

But the shadowy figure had already disappeared, and Keeth, remembering what Imozene had said about the herdsmen being afraid to go near that portion of the valley at night for fear of the haunting spirit of the other prisoner who had ventured into the mysterious tunnel, went on with a rather creepy feeling about their undertaking. The thought was gruesome.

The water murmured among the boulders as it hurried into the dark rift beneath the cliff. The three fugitives did not hesitate when they reached the mouth of the tunnel. Keeth led the way inside, and before going far from the entrance ignited one of the torches. Holding this above his head he went carefully forward, while the dancing light played over the slime covered walls of the passage and the torch hissed as the drops of moisture fell upon it from the roof.

CHAPTER XIII.—LIKE FLIES IN A BOTTLE.

THE bed of the subterranean river was strewn with boulders and broken bits of timber which had been swept in from the outer world by bygone freshets. At first the roof was only a little above their heads; but as they advanced the tunnel inclined more rapidly and it grew higher. The water ran over the stones with growing murmur and soon the roar of a cataract was borne to their ears.

"We'll be getting into a mess yet," said Ford. "Suppose we can't get over these falls we're coming to?"

"We won't suppose anything of the kind," returned Keeth briefly. "I've got our old rope that did us such good service before."

Within half an hour the noise of the falling water was so loud that they were obliged to shout to each other any communication they might wish to make. They had not been able to travel very rapidly, but were possibly half a mile from the entrance. The water poured over a great slab of rock and dropped a sheer fifteen feet. Keeth quickly looped his rope over a projecting knob and went down hand over hand. The water in which he landed was only half way to his knees.

"Come on!" he roared, waving his hand to his friends above, and although they could not hear him they could see his motion in the light of the torch he carried, so both followed him.

Keeth again coiled the rope over his arm and they went on, now wading in the water, for the passage had narrowed considerably. Sometimes the roof became quite low and they had to stoop to pass through; but nothing turned them back. All three recognized the fact that this was their only chance for liberty, and even Fitch made no audible complaint when he barked his bare shins against the boulders.

The water was ice cold in this cavern and the damp air chilled them to the bone. It was almost a continual descent after they passed the first fall, and sometimes they were obliged to scramble down over the slimy rocks on hands and knees; at other times they could make use of Keeth's rope.

"If we had to get out of here in a hurry I should pray for wings," shouted Ford, with a grin.

At length they passed the cascades and went on through a straight tunnel for several hundred yards. Keeth figured that they were nearly a mile from the entrance. And then suddenly, without any warning, they arrived at the end of the cave!

They were in a circular chamber, the floor of which was sand, and into this sand the waters of the brook sank. Not a solitary outlet appeared. They were like flies in a bottle.

"Trapped, by Jove!" exclaimed Ford.

Keeth's face looked drawn and haggard. Fitch sat down upon a boulder, puffing from his exertions. The sand below them looked damp and the slime clung to the walls far above their heads. Not long since that pocket had been full of water—probably during the last storm.

"I'm afraid," said Keeth slowly, "that the poor devil who got into this tunnel wasn't Jose."

He leaped down to the floor of the chamber. Instantly he sank knee deep in the treacherous sand. He struggled to reach the rocks again, but each step he took sank him deeper.

"You'll have to help me out, boys!" he cried, and when Ford and the trader hurried forward they found him already waist deep in the quicksand.

"Don't step down here, Ford!" Keeth warned the other. "There's no need of us both getting into it. Take that rope yonder and fling me one end. You and Fitch will have to haul me out."

All the while he was speaking the treacherous sand was dragging him down, and by the time he had got the rope knotted under his arms he had sunk to his breast.

Just as they were about to pull on the rope Fitch held up his hand.

"What is it?" demanded Ford, hanging stiffly upon the rope and cocking up his ear to listen.

A strange, muffled, moaning sound echoed down the tunnel. It died away, then swelled again to a throbbing roar. The three men looked at one another with startled faces.

"What the dickens is *that*?" demanded Ford, in an awed voice.

Fitch shook his head; but a look of intelligence flashed into the engineer's face.

"For God's sake pull me out, boys!" he gasped. "It's thunder!"

His words startled his comrades into activity. They laid hold of the rope with vigor, and after a deal of tugging managed to get him out upon the solid rock again. But he was so weakened by the strain and chilled by the exposure that he could scarcely stand.

Again that same dismal moan, long drawn and fear inspiring, came down the cavern, which acted like a speaking tube between them and the outer world.

"Go back as fast as you can, boys," said Keeth, struggling into a sitting posture. "Don't wait for me. You know what these thunder storms in the mountains are like. In a mighty short time this river will rise and you'll be drowned like rats in a hole."

"And you——" cried Ford.

"Don't stop for me, man! I tell you it's your only chance. Get up where the tunnel's broader."

"Hi say!" cried Fitch. "Hand leave you?"

"Hang it, man! Why should you two risk your lives for me?"

"And hang you!" exclaimed Ford. "What do you take us for? We'll carry you if you can't walk."

They seized him, despite his objections, and staggered up the tunnel. The muttering of the thunder was now an intermittent roar. Were they in time? They were not sure, for, as they issued from the cul-de-sac, they heard the water coming down the rocks with a different noise from that it had made a few moments ago. Clearly the storm was beginning to tell upon the stream, and the work of recrossing the pools and climbing the slippery rocks, especially with Keeth so helpless, looked desperately hard.

Keeth demanded that they set him down, after having been hauled up the first incline. The rough exercise had warmed his stiffened limbs and he pushed on as rapidly as his companions. But each moment the water increased in depth. Where they had before walked dry shod it was already over their ankles.

At the first cascade Ford climbed up alone, wasting several precious minutes in the trial, for he was not as active as Keeth. The latter, when once his friend was on the rock above, flung him the end of the rope. But he was not successful in the first cast. Ford should have taken the rope up with him, but he didn't think of that in his hurry. Keeth made a second attempt and the rope fell back upon Fitch and knocked the torch from his hand.

It went out in the water with a hiss, and they were left in total darkness. Had they another dry one? And when that was found, had they dry matches? Ford and Fitch had not, but Keeth found a single lucifer in his match safe, and after a few minutes of styx-like darkness they had the cheering presence of a flaming torch again. Then Keeth again cast the rope, this time with success.

Fitch swarmed*up like a performing elephant, and with his aid Ford was enabled to assist Keeth to the top of the cascade. The water was now sweeping down the tunnel waist deep. They hurried on, sometimes plunging into holes to their armpits, and barking their legs sadly on the hidden rocks. But Keeth held the torch high above his head and managed to keep it alive.

At last they arrived at the bottom of the highest cascade—the first one they had encountered upon entering the tunnel. The water was tumbling down it and boiled at the bottom like a caldron. The three adventurers looked at one another aghast. They could never climb up that rock, and it was an open question whether Keeth, in his present exhausted condition, could throw the rope over the knob of rock where it had been looped when they descended.

The water swirled around them and almost carried them off their feet by its force. The thunder still echoed, and reëchoed through the tunnel. The storm was at its height.

Suddenly at the top of the cascade, amid the driving spray, appeared a face—a wild, haggard face, which peered down at them with bloodshot eyes.

“What is it?” gasped Ford, shrinking back from the sight.

The creature waved its arm and fortunately Keeth understood the sign. He coiled the rope quickly and tossed it upward. The claw-like hands of the strange looking being clutched it and looped it over the jagged spur of rock. Keeth, inspired by the discovery he had made, seized the rope and went up, hand over hand. He was breathless when he reached the top and was thankful for the assistance of the stranger in getting upon the rock.

“Queek! de others!” cried his rescuer in his ear.

But Ford was already half way up the rope, and when he was by their side they laid hold of the hemp together and hauled Fitch from the bottom of the cascade. The torch had been lost again and they were in darkness.

“Follow—queek!” muttered the strange man. “The water will be over our heads in a moment. Come!”

He darted along the narrow shelf on which they stood and the three breathless men followed him. In the darkness of the cavern the outlines of the stranger looked like those of a huge ape.

In a moment they came to a crack in the wall—a crack so narrow that they had passed it by unnoticed in their descent into the tunnel. Their guide squeezed through this opening and Keeth and Ford followed him. Poor Fitch had to be fairly pulled through the crack by main force.

They found themselves in a narrow corridor, branching off at a right angle from the bed of the river. The floor at first slightly inclined upward.

In a few moments they reached a good sized room, in the middle of which a small fire was burning. Their guide went quickly to a pile of fuel in one corner and threw an armful on the blaze. The flames flashed up instantly and illuminated the place, revealing the features of all.

Keeth and his two comrades stared at the scarcely human looking figure of their rescuer. He was clad in a few shreds of garments, the original nature of which it was scarcely possible to guess. His bare arms were lean and his hands like claws. His gaunt, drawn face seemed familiar, yet it was only Keeth who was sure of his identity. He walked quickly forward and placed his hands upon the shoulders of the attenuated creature.

"Jose!" he exclaimed, "how did you get here?"

CHAPTER XIV.—ONCE MORE IMOZENE.

FITCH uttered an imprecation and fell back against the wall of the cavern, utterly unable to properly express his astonishment.

"It's never Jose Rodriguez!" exclaimed Ford, scarcely above a whisper.

"*Si, senor*—eet indeed ees," responded the strange looking individual hoarsely.

"Alive?" cried Ford again, scarcely willing to believe his eyes.

"Don't be a goose, Ford," said Keeth good naturedly. "Of course he's alive, though he looks more like a ghost than a human being."

"I haf eaten leetle for weeks," explained the Spaniard simply. "Only such food as I could pick up in the herdsmen's huts yonder."

"And we've been living on the fat of the land," said Ford. "Haven't we some food here, Keeth?"

"I lost my pack when I got into that quicksand," returned the engineer. "Perhaps Fitch has something."

"Food and torches 'ave all gone," declared the Cockney, still staring at Rodriguez with protruding eyeballs.

"Everything was swept away in the rush of the waters," said Keeth, with disappointment, "but we will get more."

"How?" demanded Ford Kinsale.

"By going back to the town."

"What—tonight?" cried Ford.

"It is already morning, senors," said Rodriguez. "The storm did not arise till near midnight. When it began to rain I feared for you and hurried down the tunnel to warn you."

"You hurried to warn us?" repeated Keeth. "How did you know we were here? Come, Jose, you must tell us your story. We have believed you dead. We searched for you all along the shore below the spot where you and that guide fell over the cliff. How did you get here? And how long have you been here?"

"The senor must wait. I cannot tell him all in a breath—eh, wha-at?" responded the Spaniard, with a smile. "Let us sit down about the fire. I am easily chilled when I haf so leetle on."

"We're hall in the same box," grunted Fitch, stretching his bare legs out toward the fire.

"True, Senor Feetch," said Jose, with another broad smile. "I did not know you all in dose raiments—eh, wha-at? I see you going into the mout' of the tunnel yonder, but I not be quite sure it you."

"Then you were the man we saw flitting about the entrance of the passage?" interjected Keeth. "We feared it was one of the Indians."

"I haf been out into de valley many nights," said Jose. "I haf try to learn if you be captive among these people. That I not able to learn for sure, though I know they haf somebody."

"Come, tell us your story," said Keeth.

The Spaniard stretched himself upon a ragged bit of blanket beside the fire, and with many gesticulations and "Eh, wha-ats?" related his terrible experience. He had fallen unhurt over the cliff in the desperate embrace of the treacherous savage, but fortunately when they struck the water the Indian was underneath. The contact with the cold water loosed the guide's hold; they sank together, but Jose alone rose. He was greatly weakened by his struggle, and the swift current swept him down stream and around the bend in the river in a very few moments. He did not get to the bank until he had been carried quite two miles below the bridge, and then he was so exhausted that he could scarcely crawl out of the water.

He lay there by the river for most of that day, but before dark climbed to the summit of the cliff. He had a little food and his blanket. He cleaned his revolvers and found plenty of ammunition for them in the waterproof compartments of his belt. At sunrise the next morning he started in search of his companions. He discovered the place where they had descended to the shore of the river and saw the effects of the landslide which had shut off their retreat to the top of the cliff. Knowing that they could not go down the river, he followed along the stream, hoping to overtake them at some point higher up.

But he was a few hours behind them, and although he reached the ruined and abandoned settlement of the Indians in time to see the party who had captured his friends entering the forest, he was not quite positive that Keeth and his companions were with them. But as the white men did not appear at any point along the river shore, he believed they *had* been taken prisoners, or that the Indians had massacred them.

Alone though he was, he determined not to return to Hualpa without assuring himself on this point. He believed that he alone knew the secret entrance to the Indians' valley, by which he had made his escape before. Therefore he ventured into the labyrinth of subterranean galleries to the tunnel through which flowed the little river which watered the inclosed valley. In these galleries he had lurked all these weeks, hoping to obtain an opportunity of speaking with the prisoners. But Keeth and his friends had not been treated as *he* had been when he was a captive. The Indians had shown him little mercy, as he was a Spaniard. He had been made to herd the llamas and goats, and work with the women in the fields.

"I haf been as far as the town at night, senors," declared Jose, in con-

clusion; "for these Indians set no watch except at the entrance to the valley. But I not find where you was lodged. Now that you haf escaped we will be off ver' soon, and I, for one, hope nefer to see this place again."

"But 'ow about that treasure?" suggested Fitch, leaning forward.

"Ah, Senor Feetch, your experience haf not made you forget dat—eh, wha-at?"

"Hi should say not. I came out for it; Hi want to take some of it back to pay me for wot Hi've been through."

"You shall haf your weesh, senor," declared the Spaniard.

"But we can't go without food," said Ford.

"True," responded Keeth. "And another supply of torches, eh, Jose?"

"The senor speaks true. Torches we must haf."

"But how will we get them?"

"Do not these heathen gather in front of their temple to worship the sun as it rises?"

"They do."

"Then let us go at that time, enter some *estado* on the outskirts of the town and take what we need."

"When shall we do it?"

"Tonight," replied Jose.

"'Anged if Hi believe Hi could squeeze through that place again," said Fitch, nodding toward the narrow aperature by which they had gained entrance to their present abode. "Hi was so scared then that Hi felt small and slipped through easy."

"Slipped through easy!" exclaimed Ford, laughing. "If I hadu't pulled like a yoke of steers, you'd be sticking there yet."

"We not all go," said Jose. "Two of us a plenty, eh, Senor Keeth?"

"Yes; you and I, if you think you can stand it."

"Ver' well. We will go. And now, senors, as we cannot eat, let us sleep," and the Spaniard followed out his own philosophical suggestion by rolling up in the tattered blanket and dropping off at once. The others did the same, and all four slept until late in the day.

When they awoke Keeth and Ford, with a flaming brand from the fire, went out through the narrow passage to the river. The water had subsided and trickled peacefully along the rocky bed, falling over the first cascade with a pleasant roar. They could scarcely realize that it was the same stream that had threatened to overwhelm them early in the morning.

They walked out to the end of the tunnel and looked into the valley. Nobody was in sight—not even the herdsmen. Of course their escape had been discovered, but if their recent captors suspected that they had entered the tunnel they doubtless believed that the sudden tempest which had broken over the valley had raised the river to such a height as to drown their prisoners.

They went back to their comrades and waited in the side chamber, with such patience as they could command, for the time to come for the raid upon the stores of the Indians. Fitch dozed; but the three younger men felt their situation too keenly to admit of that. They sat in silence, for the most part,

until past midnight. Then Jose declared it time they started, and shaking hands with Ford and letting the sleeping Fitch lie undisturbed, he and Keeth went out.

They were both armed with revolvers, and their last act before leaving the retreat was to make sure that the weapons were in perfect order.

"I hope we won't have to use them," said Keeth, as they set off; "but if we *should* happen to need 'em, we'll need 'em bad."

They made their way to the mouth of the tunnel, and after assuring themselves that there were none of their enemies lurking near, they slipped out of the passage and set off up the valley in the direction of the town. The mist lay heavy upon the ground, and out of this gray cloud occasionally appeared the elongated shadow of a stray llama, quietly feeding. They saw no herdsmen; if they had, they would scarcely have been challenged; for in the dim light Keeth looked like an Indian himself, and Jose looked as much like one as he did like anything human.

The eastern sky was already aglow when they reached the edge of the group of stone buildings about the temple. Like two shadows they crept behind one of the houses and crouched down to wait for the people to gather on the plaza. They could hear the occupants of the house stirring and soon the beating of the brazen gongs on the temple porch denoted that the time for the morning sacrifice was near at hand. The people left their houses and hurried to the place.

When the sound of the sandals had died away the two fugitives ventured into the house. On a stone slab beside the fireplace were bread and meat which the woman had prepared for the family breakfast. Keeth seized a blanket and wrapped the food in it.

Then they entered another house, and another, in each finding food but few torches. It was quite necessary that they should have plenty of light wood, for Jose declared the caverns through which he proposed to lead them to be a veritable labyrinth, and the only manner by which they might find their way was by marks he had made upon the walls.

But the houses seemed all deserted, and as long as the people remained in the temple court they might search for what they needed unmolested. They went from house to house as coolly as though nearly a thousand savages were not gathered within a few rods of them. Finally, from one place and another, Jose managed to collect a goodly bundle of torches. These he strapped upon his back, so as to leave his hands free; Keeth had already done the same with his package of provisions.

"Now come on," whispered the latter. "We'll get out before they begin their pow-wow."

But in going back they passed within sight of the plaza. The open space before the temple was choked with people, but all standing as motionless as graven images. It was growing lighter now and the fugitives could see across the plaza to the group of priests upon the temple porch. The great gongs ceased their clangor, and as they gazed the crowd of white robed priests parted and a figure dressed in savage magnificence swept down the steps to the altar. It was Gonnatzl.

Keeth halted and clutched his companion by the arm.

"Wait," he said breathlessly. "That is the new high priest. Let us see what follows."

"We shall be discovered, senior," whispered Jose.

"Not yet."

The light of the torches which attendants held upon either hand fell full upon the noble figure of the young Indian. Massive gold bands covered his arms, and great bars of gold hung from his ears. The cloak which swept the steps behind him flashed a dozen lovely shades. It was made of the brilliant plumage of the paroquet and a chain of dull gold links held it upon his shoulders.

After standing a moment in silence the prince began to speak. His powerful voice penetrated to the farthest side of the plaza and every word was easily distinguished by Keeth. His first few sentences held the fugitive enthralled. *Gonnatzl was arraigning the Princess Imozene for the escape of the three white men!*

Keeth could hear murmurings of anger break out among the assembly as the wily Gonnatzl went on. The man accused her of forsaking her own people for the love of one of the white prisoners. Keeth's face burned and his hand clutched the butt of his pistol as he listened to the foul accusations. He blamed himself now—oh, how bitterly!—for leaving the girl to the mercy of her people. Yet, at the time, he had believed he was doing right.

Suddenly a rosy beam of light filtered through the fog. The sun was rising. At a motion from Gonnatzl the torches were extinguished and the people commenced a wild, fierce chant. The crowd of priests above him separated and a slight, shrinking figure was pushed forward. It was Imozene!

The high priest seized her by the shoulder and dragged her forward to the altar. Her wrists were knotted together behind her back and her clothing had been half torn from her body. With a quick twist of his muscular arm Gonnatzl threw her back upon the altar, and just as the first beam of the sun struck full upon him he poised the huge sacrificial knife above her bared breast.

He drew back the knife for the awful stroke. The assembly was hushed again.

Suddenly the crack of a pistol shattered the silence. A tiny red mark appeared in the center of the high priest's forehead and he staggered back a step. The knife fell clattering to the pavement, and swinging around with blindly groping hands Gonnatzl dropped at full length beside the altar.

The awed hush was broken by frightened screams of women and the hoarse cries of men. Several of the priests rushed forward to their fallen leader; but again the crack of the revolver rose above the tumult. One and then another fell, or staggered back in agony as the leaden messengers reached their marks. The fusillade continued. They could see nothing—not even the smoke of the discharge. Simply the whiplike crack of the weapon and the dropping of those about the altar—that was all.

The cries of the assembly rose to a terrified shriek. They scattered through the lanes and alleys of the town. The priests darted back into

the temple, leaving their dead and wounded companions heaped about the altar.

Suddenly a figure leaped out from the shelter of a house and ran across the deserted court. It was Keeth ; but the fusillade of pistol shots did not cease, for Jose stood at the corner of the building and fired at the last disappearing Indians.

The American reached the altar in an instant. He whipped out his knife and cut the bonds of the victim of the Indians' fanatical rage. He raised her in his arms and turned to fly. But the girl's eyes were closed and she lay a dead weight against his breast.

Was she dead? Had the horror of the awful experience through which she had passed snapped the frail thread of life? Keeth tried to feel if her heart beat, but in his horror he was unable to discover the faintest flutter.

"My God! she *is* dead!" he thought, and staggered down from the altar. "She is dead!" he repeated, and pressed his lips to the closed lids and pallid cheeks.

And then, as though his touch had called her back to life, the eyes opened and she gazed up into his own.

"My lord," she whispered, in wonder, "is it thou?"

Suddenly Jose's voice rang out across the plaza :

"*Como, senor ! Que desea ?*"* They are coming back. Quick!"

Aroused by these words Keeth recrossed the court and joined his comrade.

"We haf not a moment to lose!" cried Jose. "What do you wit' the *senorita*?"

"She goes with us," replied Keeth, between his teeth. "If I cannot escape with her, I'll not escape at all."

They ran toward the edge of the town, but before they reached the open country the brazen gongs of the temple clanged forth a summons for the gathering of the populace. Soon they would be pursued, and Keeth strained every effort to keep pace with his more fleet footed companion.

CHAPTER XV.—AT LAST THE TREASURE.

KEETH will never forget that race in the dusk of the early morning. A great mass of drab cloud obscured the face of the lately risen sun, and the fog still lay thick upon the valley. The damp mist wrapped them about like a blanket and hid them from the eyes of the savages.

They met none of their enemies during the flight down the valley. *They* were all behind. But the loud notes of the brazen gongs rang in their ears till they reached and entered the tunnel.

Keeth was panting from exhaustion ; but he would not set Imozene down until they were well into the subterranean passage. Jose drew his match safe from a ragged pocket and lit one of the torches. With this flaming over his head he led the way. The American followed him, still bearing most of the girl's weight upon his arm.

"My lord," she said, "where are we going?"

* "*Come, senor ! What do you want ?*"

"Do you fear to trust yourself to me, Imozene?" he asked.

She halted in the rough path and cast her arms about his neck. "Not now, my lord, for I know thou lovest me."

"Not even if I tell thee thou wilt never see thy people again?"

She shuddered. "They are no longer my people. If I follow thee to the abode of the gods, it were better!"

"Then thou shalt go to *my* people, Imozene," he said, and they went on again, hand in hand.

Ford was waiting for them at the entrance of the side passage, anxious because of their long absence. When he saw Imozene several different emotions struggled for the mastery in his face at once; but something in Keeth's eye warned him to restrain his natural impulse to chaff. They all four entered the inner chamber and awoke Fitch. Before anything else was done or said Keeth briefly related what had occurred in the town, and the circumstances which led to Imozene's presence with them.

"Hand you did just right, Mr. Keeth!" declared Fitch. "Them bloody devils! Hi'm only sorry Hi didn't get a shot at 'em myself. D'ye think there's henny likelihood of their attacking us here?"

"I don't know," returned Keeth.

"We will not give them the chance," said Jose. "We will stop up the entrance to thees place and then go on t'rough the caverns to the river. Come, senors! at once."

He naturally took the lead, and with Ford's and Keeth's assistance set about closing the entrance of their retreat. From some dark part of the chamber he produced a rudely wrought iron bar and with its aid pried several bulky boulders into the passage. These they "choked" with smaller stones, finally completing a barrier that would cause their enemies much trouble in breaking down, even providing they discovered the fugitives' retreat. Then, with the bar in one hand and a blazing torch in the other, Jose led his little party deeper into the bowels of the mountain.

"Thees rock is soft, senor," he said to Keeth. "Some time—long past—the water carve out these passages. They lead down—down—down till they reach the level of the river. The ancestors of these Indians perhaps used thees way ver' mooch—*quien sabe?*"

Imozene looked about her in wonder as they passed down the echoing aisles; yet she recognized the place from the traditions of her people.

"My lord," she said, "are not these the lost treasure caves of my people?"

"So we believe," replied Keeth. "Our friend, yonder—he who bears the mark upon his face—discovered this way of escape when he ran from thy people months ago. It will now prove our salvation."

As they went on they had often to halt and examine with interest the carven walls and hideously sculptured columns which upheld the roof of the caverns. In some apartments were rude forges and iron and bronze implements which showed the early occupants of the caverns to have possessed no inconsiderable knowledge of metal working. Fitch was in a continual state of amazement.

"Hi wouldn't 'ave believed hit!" he kept repeating. "Hi *cyn't* believe them niggers ever did all this."

In one great cave, the roof of which arched above their heads like the dome of a subterranean St. Peter's, Jose led them to a point in the wall where a seam of glittering quartz, quite two feet wide, was laid bare from base to roof. It flashed back the light of the torches most dazzlingly. It was a vein of gold!

A little further on they passed into a smaller chamber through a crumbling doorway. The door itself lay upon the floor, but the lintels were still well preserved, showing how slight the action of the atmosphere had been upon them during the centuries since they were placed there. The air was perfectly dry and sweet throughout the cave.

"Senors," exclaimed Jose, waving the torch around his head, "feast your eyes upon the treasures of the Incas!"

The walls were covered with rude picture writing. But these attracted no attention from his comrades. On the floor were heaped hundreds of bars of metal such as Jose had shown them that day on the trail to Hualpa. They were of gold—pure, virgin gold!

Fitch and Ford Kinsale fairly cast themselves upon the ground before the treasure. But to Keeth the gold seemed of smaller moment now.

"Why, man! what ails you?" demanded Ford, looking up at him. "Don't you see we're rich for life?"

"Providing we can get away with enough of hit," interposed Fitch, handling the bars almost caressingly.

"I see," returned Keeth; "but Imozene here is laughing at you. She doesn't consider the stuff worth much, and I don't know but she's more than half right."

"Fol-de-roll!" exclaimed Fitch. "When a man has a chance to make his fortune in a moment, he'll do it—even *you*, Mr. Keeth."

"For my part," said Ford determinedly, "I shall take all the stuff with me I can carry, and I advise you to do the same."

"You're right, Mr. Kinsale," the trader said. "Hit's a crime to waste a hopportunity like this, Hi say!"

And it was so. When they left the treasure room the next morning every man was loaded down with bars of gold, Keeth as heavily as the rest. He remembered that money would be a good thing after all, if he was going to take Imozene back to New York with him. They found upon the floor of the chamber not a few valuable stones as well, and had not prudence forbade their longer remaining, they would have explored other portions of the labyrinth.

Near noon of the second day they emerged from a narrow defile, which was a continuation of the main gallery of the cavern, and found themselves upon the wooded, gently sloping bank of a river. The towering cliffs and peaks were at their back, and the low foothills to the east scarcely obstructed their view of the horizon. They had passed through the mountains and were many and many a league from Hualpa.

After careful discussion they decided that to try to reach the town as

Jose had would be a matter of great difficulty, and at Keeth's suggestion they constructed a stout raft and set sail upon it, supposing that the stream would turn out to be a branch of the Huallaga, and that they would reach some settlement upon its banks.

It proved, however, to be a branch of an entirely different river, and after sailing for three days and nights they entered a stream so broad that Fitch declared it to be one of the main arms of the Amazon. And he was right, though it was not until nearly a fortnight that they arrived at a trading station where his opinion was verified.

Being already so far from the Pacific coast, they decided to follow the current to the east, and after purchasing a large "wood skin" and plenty of arms and ammunition, and hiring a member of an interior tribe for a guide, they pursued their way down the great river. Four months after making their escape from the Incas' cave they arrived at Santarem, where they were able to get passage in a sailing vessel to Para, and from that city took steamer for New York.

It was nearly eight months from that eventful morning when Imozene was the intended victim of the Incas' awful sacrificial ceremony, that the steamship reached New York quarantine. Eight months' daily intercourse with her companions, and proper habiliments which had been obtained for her at one of the Amazon river towns, had changed her appearance wonderfully. She had learned to speak English, too, with a most charming accent, and Keeth, who had cabled his sister from Para, was not at all doubtful as to the impression Imozene would make when she came aboard to welcome them.

The bars of gold had been exchanged for drafts in Santarem and Para, and after negotiating for the sale of most of the uncut gems which they had brought with them, Fitch and Jose Rodriguez sailed for Liverpool, the former to dazzle the eyes of his Cockney relatives, and the Spaniard to return to his native country.

Ford Kinsale and Keeth bought homes near each other close to New York. Kinsale once in a while talks about going back to Peru with a larger party and exploring the Incas' cave further, and seeing if something cannot be done toward reopening and working the abandoned mines of the ancient tribe. It would mean wealth untold, but nevertheless Keeth always does his best to discourage such suggestions. He cannot forget old Inzalkl's warning, or the prophetic vision he himself beheld while under the priest's hypnotic influence.

And then, Ford doesn't talk near as much about journeying to the uncivilized portions of the globe as he did. Keeth's sister, who finds that she is no longer so necessary to her brother's comfort now that he is married, has consented to give more of her attention to Ford, which satisfies him far better than anything the field of exploration has to offer.

W. Bert Foster.

THE END.

SULLIVAN JONES' BOARDERS.

How the plans of two gentlemanly rascals were neatly thwarted by a pair of clever boys.—
A successful robbery followed by an equally successful capture.

I.

WITH a long, shrill whistle, which echoed through the Kittatinny Gap, and a glare from its headlight that danced and glimmered far across the water and then vanished in the deep shadow of Cove Mountain, the night mail swept around the Narrows and thundered up to the little station at Dauphin.

A brief pause, a pull at the bell rope, and it rushed on up the Northern Central toward Sunbury, rattling through the village street, and spitting out columns of red flame at spasmodic intervals.

The station master, the telegraph operator, and half a dozen wildly dissipated individuals who kept late hours, came to the door of the waiting room and looked with eager curiosity at the two passengers who had just alighted.

They were young men, both of them—thirty or thirty five one would say—and they did not look unlike ; for each had a closely cropped yellow beard and a drooping golden mustache. They wore neat fitting suits of rough tweed and soft slouch hats, and each carried a big valise, a gun neatly cased, and a bunch of fishing rods.

Sportsmen from the city evidently, and just such men as could be found every season down at Rockville or up above the Clark's Ferry dam, where the fishing was best. But to find them at Dauphin was more of a rarity, for although the fishing is equally good the river here is dangerous and full of peril.

The two strangers paid no heed to the crowd in the doorway, and sought no information, but after a short consultation lifted their valises and started quietly down the road.

Without hesitation they crossed the Stony Creek bridge in the darkness, and pulled up a moment later at the old tavern. It was only half past ten, but within all was dark and silent.

"This is the place, Jim," said one of them.

"Yes, I believe so. We'll make sure, though."

He struck a match, and holding it up to the weatherbeaten sign that creaked over the entrance, he read in faded letters :

STONY CREEK TAVERN.

SULLIVAN JONES.

As the match died out they stepped across the porch and rapped sharply on the door. Twice they repeated it, and at the third summons an upper

window was raised, and the harsh voice of Mr. Sullivan Jones himself answered: "What's wanted down thar?"

The men stepped off the porch and looked up.

"Are you Mr. Jones?" said one.

"That's my name, sir."

"Ah, well. You perhaps recollect an inquiry some time ago from the city concerning accommodations for two fishermen. We are the parties who wrote you."

"Waal, waal. Is that so? I had no idee you was comin'. Just wait a minit, will ye?"

The window was slammed down, and soon a light shone and a commotion was heard in the house, and then the door was opened and Mr. Jones ushered his guests inside, slamming the door in the face of the inquisitive group from the station who had followed on behind.

Before eight o'clock the next morning all Dauphin had passed and repassed by the tavern door, much to the glory of old Jones, who smoked his pipe on the porch and smiled kindly on the villagers. It was nearly noon, however, when the new arrivals condescended to come down stairs, and, while they were partaking of a late breakfast in the special dining room, the crowd flocked into the combined barroom and office and read on the pages of the register—which book, by the way, had been opened thirty years before and was nearly a quarter full—the neatly inscribed entries, on which the ink was hardly dry:

J. MAYNE PRIOR, NEW YORK.

DOUGLAS R. MORTLOCK, NEW YORK.

While old Jones attends to the wants of the thirsty crowd in the barroom, we will take a glance at the important individuals at breakfast.

In the light of day they appear a little older perhaps, and the expression of their uneasy gray eyes would impress a close observer of character rather unfavorably. There is an indefinable something that rather detracts from the gentle appearance of those soft beards and mustaches.

"All right so far," says Mr. Prior, as he dissects a tempting omelette.

"Yes," responds Mr. Mortlock, who is slowly sipping his coffee. "The outlook is favorable, and as for the people with whom our lot is cast I must confess they appear childlike and bland to a marked degree."

Breakfast over, the two go out and smoke their cigars on the porch. The afternoon is devoted to getting on the right side of the citizens, which is speedily accomplished by a general invitation to appear before the bar, and before nightfall Dauphin has unanimously declared the strangers to be two of the most perfect gentlemen that ever graced the town with their presence.

They prove to be enthusiastic sportsmen, and under the expert guidance of Mr. Jones, who is an oracle on angling, they spend the next few days in fishing for bass around the piers of the old bridge, but strange to say it is old Jones who catches all the fish. They do a little gunning for snipe, too, and in the evening they come out on the tavern porch, and listen to the somewhat remarkable conversations that take place, for Dauphin is at present the

headquarters for a large force of men who are relaying the Pottsville division of the Reading Road which was almost entirely destroyed in a recent flood.

II.

UP along the river road at a cozy little farm house, Tom Lurgan and Charlie Rogers were spending a two weeks' vacation. They both had positions in a large clothing store in Harrisburg, and chose this way of passing their holidays from reasons of economy.

It was Saturday evening and they were on their way down to the post office to get their mail.

"Do you know, Charlie," said Tom abruptly, "I would give a good deal to know what those two men are doing in Dauphin. They have been here now for nearly a week and they know very little about fishing, for I don't believe either of them has caught a bass yet, though they go out on the river every day."

"It *is* strange," replied Charlie. "Did you notice they can't even handle their rods right?"

"Yes," continued Tom, "and I discovered a very queer thing yesterday. You know young Carson down by the lock? Well, he says this man Mortlock bought an old boat and a pair of oars from him, and has it hidden among the rocks down at the foot of the wall somewhere near the curve. Carson took it down for him, and Mortlock said he wanted to use it to go fishing early in the morning. It may be very foolish and all that, but I can't help feeling that these men are here for a purpose. We will keep our eyes open, anyhow."

When the boys reached the post office, early as it was, the tavern porch across the way was filled, and the crowd were singing scraps of songs.

"What's up tonight?" asked Tom.

"Well," replied the postmaster, "you see it's pay night, an' they're feelin' purty good. They haven't been paid fur nigh onto three weeks or more, an' tonight the paymaster comes down here with the stuff."

"When does he get here?" asked Tom.

"Well, let me see. The pay car reaches Ellendale Forge at half past seven. From there the road ain't been tested yet, so the paymaster takes the hand truck an' comes on down ter Dauphin on that. I believe he goes on down ter Rockville an' Harrisburg, an' pays the men off there, too. He'll get here in an hour or too, for it's half past six now."

"Much obliged," said Tom, and the boys left the post office.

As they crossed over toward the tavern, a man came running up excitedly from the direction of the station. It was Mike Malley, the road foreman.

"Stir yourselves," he shouted to the loungers on the porch. "Thar's a landslide up at Powel's Creek, an' the bridge is gone, an' the wires cut off. Thar's no time to lose, so come on now, all of you. We must do all we kin tonight yet."

Some grumbling followed this startling piece of news.

"Whar'd you hear all that?" cried some one.

"Down at the station," cried Mike. "The operator found he was shut off, an' then a trackman from Powel's Creek come down the river in a boat, an' told me. He went on down to tell the gang at Rockville. But, come on now, we must beat the Rockville gang, sure."

The men jumped up and hurried down to the station, where half a dozen hand cars lay on a side track, while a lot of the villagers, out of mere curiosity, started to walk up the river to the scene of the disaster at Powel's Creek.

It all happened so quickly that when the boys reached the tavern it was deserted and Sullivan Jones was standing on the porch wearing a somewhat sour expression on his wrinkled features, for he had counted on a very busy evening.

"We want a couple of your best cigars," said Tom, and then following him back to the bar he added, "Where are your two boarders tonight, Mr. Jones?"

The tavern keeper handed out the box and then said slowly :

"They've gone fishin' up Stony Creek. Started 'bout half an hour ago in Abe Miller's boat. They're mighty fine fellers, but blamed ef they know much about fishin'. Why, they went for pike with a big cork an' a can of worms," and Mr. Jones shook his head as he tapped a bottle of birch beer for the postmaster who had just entered and called for his favorite beverage.

The boys left the tavern, and bidding Charlie wait a moment on the porch, Tom ran up to a store a few doors above and purchased a red light left over from the Fourth of July stock. He stowed it away in his pocket and hurried back to the tavern.

"I have an idea, Charlie," he said hurriedly. "I can't take time to tell you. Come on along quick."

They hastily crossed the bridge and turned up along the railroad.

Stony Creek dam lay on their left, but no fishermen could be seen on its broad surface. Half a mile further it ended abruptly, and the boys forced their way down through the bushes to the point where the creek entered the dam from above.

Pulled up in the bushes lay the boat, the rods and the can of worms still resting on the seat, but no trace of the fishermen.

Tom's face paled for an instant.

"By Jove, Charlie," he cried, "I see it all. Those men are going to rob the paymaster! Look here now," he continued excitedly, "we must do something. If I was only certain it was right we could alarm the village and capture these fellows in their own trap. But there is the rub. Suppose there is nothing in it after all? I thought of that so I bought this red light at the store. Now listen, Charlie, here's what you must do. Go back to Dauphin and stay around the station where you can see up the valley. I will hurry on ahead. It will soon be dark now, and the paymaster ought to get here in less than an hour. If I discover anything I will run up on the side of the mountain and touch off this red light, and as soon as you see the signal, alarm the village, and send them up the valley as fast as they can go.

You know what to do now, so hurry back, and keep a sharp lookout ;" and leaving Charlie standing by the boat Tom plunged into the bushes.

III.

TOM kept on for a mile or more and then it began to grow dark. He felt that he was in a situation of peril, for if robbery was the object of these men they would hardly hesitate at murder to accomplish their plans, and the more he pondered over it the more certain he felt that his suspicions were justified, for all the circumstances pointed just that way.

He was now nearly two miles up the valley. It was rapidly growing dark, and as yet he had seen and heard nothing. A few feet above him, up a little embankment, lay the railroad track with the mountain rising steep beyond. Not far ahead, round a slight curve, the creek ran in between the mountain and the railroad and was crossed by an open trestle work. Tom stopped a moment. All was silent. But hark !

A low, grating sound rises in the distance. It comes closer, becomes louder, and up above his head the rails begin to sing faintly.

Tom quickly forced his way up the bank, through the thorny blackberry bushes, and peered cautiously out. It had grown suddenly dark in the last minute, and he can only see an indistinct form rolling round the curve above him. It rushes on swifter and swifter, and with a whirr like the rising of quail, the velocipede hand car dashes past him in the gloom, with two motionless figures on the seat. Tom drew a long breath and stepped out from his place of concealment. What a fool he was to be sure ! All this trouble and worry for nothing. He turned down the track toward Dauphin, when suddenly a thought strikes him—a thought that brings him to a stand-still and makes his blood run cold. He turned and hurried up the track. He rounded the curve, approached the trestle work, and stood looking down on the shallow bed of Stony Creek. A cry of horror and he leaped down the embankment.

Two motionless forms lay among the stones, dead, to all appearances ; but placing his hand on the breast of the man nearest him, Tom felt the heart beat faintly. He pulled him to a sitting position and dashed water on his face again and again, and finally with a moan of pain the man opened his eyes and closed them again wearily.

The other lay partly in the water. No sign of life was visible, and, dragging the body to the shore, Tom rushed up the bank, and with frantic leaps fairly flew up the face of the mountain.

If he could only give the alarm in time ! The murderers must be near Dauphin already.

Half way up he stops. He scrapes a match on the rock. It burns and goes out. The next one burns brightly and ignites the end of the red light. A moment of suspense and then the ruddy scarlet glow flares up like a volcano.

IV.

CHARLIE made his way slowly back to Dauphin. He was just a little doubtful about this deadly plot of Tom's, but he was equally suspicious

of these strange fishermen, so he determined to be on the alert for Tom's signal.

He sat down for a while on the old stone wall of the bridge, and watched the water rushing under the arches. Once he heard a faint roaring sound up the valley, like the rumble of a distant train, but it stopped suddenly. He felt thirsty, and wanted a drink; but he dared not leave his post.

After a while the station master came down the road toward the village, and as he reached the bridge a man on horseback galloped furiously down the street.

"Hello Malley, what's up?" called the station master.

The foreman pulled his horse up short.

"Is that you?" he cried. "Has Darrel arrived yet with the money?"

"No; he's late tonight."

"Good Lord!" cried Malley. "Something's wrong. There's no landslide at Powel's Creek at all. Hurry back to the station, quick!"

The station master turned back with Malley, and for a moment Charlie sat there, absolutely dazed; for all doubt was gone now.

Every second was precious. Malley and the station master were already out of sight. Should he run to the station or to the tavern? But no; the tavern was deserted. He had a better plan.

Down at the canal, just above the lock, was a little inn, frequented by boatmen, and here at night were to be found all the fishermen of the village—strong, sturdy fellows, who sat on the benches, smoking and chatting. He dashed over the bridge and down the road, and looking over his shoulder as he ran, he saw behind him a red glare rising over the darkness of the valley.

He was close to the river now, for he could see lights shining down toward Marysville. A few steps more, and he ran down to the bank of the canal.

No one was at the lock, but up at the inn the lamp was lit. In three jumps he crossed the swinging bridge. A few yards more and—

He sprang back in fright as two burly figures rose from the ground and seized him. A gag was stuffed into his mouth, a cold pistol barrel was pressed to his forehead, and, grasped by each arm, he was forced quickly down the towpath.

Unable to resist or make any outcry, he was hurried on under the shadow of the old Susquehanna bridge, across a bar of yellow light that actually streamed down from the station, where a loud commotion was already heard, and then the three passed on into the deep shadows of the trees that fringed the towpath.

They were directly opposite the Narrows now. On the left lay the canal, dark with the reflected shadows of the mountain; to the right, the wall of rock, falling sheer and steep to the river—the famed Dauphin Rapids, that boiled and raged in their rocky channel.

Round the bend they stopped. It was moonlight now, and Charlie easily recognized Mr. Mortlock and Mr. Prior. Prior took the gag from his mouth.

"No noise, now," he said, tossing the revolver up and down in his hand. "Can you guide a boat through these rapids?"

Charlie shook his head.

"You lie!" said Prior. "You know the channel, and you must take us across."

A yard beyond rude steps ran down the side of the wall. Prior took the lead, pulling Charlie after him, and Mortlock came behind, tugging at a valise that seemed to be a terribly heavy burden.

At the bottom Prior drew a boat from the bushes. They forced Charlie to the middle seat, and then took their places, one at each end.

"Now, then," said Prior, "take those oars, and land us safely on the other side below the Falls. No trifling, now, or you'll make food for the fishes;" and he handled the revolver in a suggestive way.

There was no escape, so Charlie took the oars and pulled out into the current. He was badly scared, but he still had his wits about him, and as the boat glided ahead under his quick strokes he tried to think what to do.

The robbers—murderers indeed, no doubt—intended to catch a train somewhere on the other side. The satchel contained the stolen money. They were desperate men, and to thwart them in their plans would be next to impossible. The river was very low, and the channel was extremely perilous. Little wonder the robbers had pressed a guide into their service.

Bright as snow in the moonlight the rocks tossed up the foam and spray, but with a cunning hand Charlie steered the boat among them, scraping dangerously near at times, and then riding high on the crest of the waves. At his back was Mortlock, with the valise, while Prior faced him, revolver still in hand.

Neither of them spoke as the passage was safely made through the first dangerous rift, and when they reached a bit of calm water, Prior said:

"Now mind, young fellow, no nonsense. Take us below the Falls all right, and we'll land you high and dry on the first island. Some one will take you off in the morning. And not a word about this to any one!"

They were now half a mile above the Rockville Falls. In their rear lay the scattered lights of Dauphin, while ahead, over the top of the great Rockville bridge, a silvery white halo reflected from the electric lamps showed where Harrisburg lay, five miles below.

A spurt through the rapids again, and the boat shot beneath the bridge. As they neared the Falls and the roar of the water increased, Prior looked about him uneasily.

The Rockville Falls are almost an unbroken line of gray rocks that stretch in the form of a crescent a mile and quarter across the river. The channels are known only to the old rivermen, and are dangerous at all times.

In the center rises an unusually high group of rocks, running a few yards above the Falls, and splitting the current into two streams, which sweep around it on both sides with terrible velocity. Straight for this point Charlie steered the boat, and as it shot with the swiftness of an arrow directly toward the rocks, both men half rose in alarm.

"Now, then," Charlie called out loudly above the roar of the water,

"when the boat strikes, jump out. I will go over the Falls, and take you in from below."

Prior made a motion of assent. No thought of trickery entered his head. With a clever stroke Charlie carried the boat directly across where the current split, and in an instant it grated heavily on the rocks. Prior and Mortlock made the jump safely, and the boat, freed of their weight, swung into the current on the right. With a dizzy whirl it plunged into the seething abyss of foam and spray, and shot over the Falls. It struck fair and square below, and as the short, choppy waves smacked it on the sides, Charlie rose to his feet, and then like a flash dived overboard.

He rose gasping for breath and clutched the bow of the boat. A moment of silent suspense, and then crack, crack, crack, the bullets pattered about him while a terrible cry of rage burst from the baffled robbers on the rock.

He was out of danger in an instant, borne on by the fierce current, and in a few moments he grounded on a grass bar.

It was short work to turn the boat and empty it, and then with eager excitement he pulled for shore. At Rockville he luckily caught the night mail, and just as they were bringing Paymaster Darrel and his assistants into the village on stretchers, he rushed among them dripping wet and breathless.

A dozen boats started for the Falls, and two hours later they came back with the robbers and the bag of money. Unable to swim, they were as secure on the rocks as they would have been in prison, and without resistance they surrendered.

No one in Dauphin slept that night, and when Sunday morning dawned, a ceaseless crowd flocked to the old tavern to shake hands with the brave boys who had caused the capture of the robbers, while overhead in old Jones' best room the injured men came slowly back to life and consciousness.

The robbers had thrown the car from the track by means of a big stone, hurling the riders into the creek below, where they lay stunned and in shallow water. Then seizing the money and dragging the uninjured truck to the rails, they actually rode down to the edge of the village, thus getting ahead of Tom's signal.

The confederate who brought the false news of the landslide, and thus cleared the coast for the robbers, was never discovered.

Mr. Prior and Mr. Mortlock were promptly convicted and sent to the penitentiary, and Tom Lurgan and Charlie Rogers received a present from the railroad company that will enable them to spend their future vacations where they please.

Mr. Sullivan Jones still smokes his pipe on the tavern porch, and is always willing to relate the whole story to the chance traveler who puts up at his inn.

"Yes, indeed," he invariably adds at the close, "appearances is a mighty deceitful thing, an' not to be relied on at all. "Why, sir, you never seen in your life two more perfect seemin' gentlemen than them same Mr. Prior and Mr. Mortlock, an' yet, sir, they was bad to the core."

William Murray Graydon.

BY RIGHT OF SWORD.*

A tale of Moscow, the Nihilists, and the Czar—The extraordinary experiences of an Englishman who assumes the name and obligations of a Russian army officer—Complications that bring the bold adventurer within shivering distance of Siberia, and the tactics which earn for him a notable nickname.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

HAMILTON TREGETHNER is an Englishman who has lived a great part of his life in Russia. Deceived by the woman he loves, he is about to go to St. Petersburg to offer himself for the field in the event of war with Turkey, hoping somebody will put a bullet through him, when at the Moscow railway station he is approached by a stranger, Olga Petrovitch, who takes him for her brother Alexis, to whom he bears a marvelous resemblance. This Alexis is a good for nothing roysterer, a lieutenant in the Russian army. He has become involved in a quarrel with Major Devinsky, who persecutes Olga with unwelcome attentions, and fearing to meet the major on the dueling field, is about to flee in disguise. Tregethner becomes interested in the case, and being reckless of what he does in any event, gives Alexis his passport as Hamilton Tregethner and decides to remain in Moscow as Alexis Petrovitch. He fights the duel with Devinsky, utterly routing him, but presently finds himself in a tangle because of a love affair his predecessor had with Paula Tucskei, the wife of the chief of police. She is deceived, as are all other friends of the lieutenant, to say nothing of the Nihilists, with whom it turns out he has had dealings.

One night he is summoned to a meeting in a house by the riverside. After being conducted through devious ways, he finds himself in a room occupied by some thirty or forty men, each carrying a knife. He is told that he has been brought there to die, whereupon he declares that he will make it easier for them to kill him by giving up his revolver and baring the heart side of his breast. A tall man seizes him in a grip like iron, and bends him backward so that either his throat or his heart is at the mercy of the long knife he raises aloft.

CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)—THE RIVERSIDE MEETING.

I LET no sound escape me and did not move a muscle. The next instant my left hand was seized and a finger pressed on my pulse. In this position I remained for a full minute. I do not believe that my pulse quickened, save for the physical strain, by so much as one beat.

"It is enough," said the man who had before spoken; and I was released.

"You are no coward," he added, addressing me. "I withdraw that. You can have your life, on one condition."

"And that?"

"That you swear——"

"I will swear nothing," I interposed.

"You have taken the oath of fealty."

"I will swear nothing. Take my life if you like, but swear I will not.

This story began in the July, 1897, issue of THE ARGOSY, which will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10 cents.

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If I had meant treachery, I should have had the police round us tonight like a swarm of bees. You have had a proof whether I'm true or not; and when I turn traitor, you can run a blade into my heart or lodge a bullet in my brain. But oaths are nothing to a man who means either to keep or break his word. What is the condition? I told you mine before."

"Yours is accepted. Your task is"—here he sunk his voice and whispered right into my ear—"the death of Christian Tueski."

"I accept," I answered readily. I would have accepted had they told me to kill the Czar himself. "But it will take time. I will have no other hand in it than mine. It is a glorious commission. Mine alone the honor of success, and mine alone the danger, or mine alone the disgrace of failure." I looked on the whole thing now as more or less of a burlesque; but I planned the part I had chosen as well as I could. And when the little puny rebel put out his hand in the darkness and clasped mine, I gripped his with a force that made his bones crack, as if to convey to him the intensity of my resolve, and my enthusiastic pleasure at the bloody work they had allotted me.

Then I was told to leave, and in a few minutes I was once more in the open air, quite as undecided then, as I have always remained, as to what had been the real intentions in regard to myself.

One of my chief regrets was not to be able to see the burly giant who had twisted me about on his knee as easily as I should a fowl whose neck I meant to wring. He was indeed a man to admire, and I would have given much for a sight of him.

But my guide hurried me back through the labyrinth of streets into respectable Moscow once more, and I was soon busy wondering how long a shrift I should have before my new "comrades" would grow impatient for me to act.

Certainly they would have plenty of time for their impatience to grow very cold before I should turn murderer to further their schemes. But I could not foresee the strange chain of events which was fated to fasten on me the new character that I had assumed so lightly and dramatically—the character of a desperate, bloodthirsty, and absolutely reckless Nihilist.

CHAPTER IX.—DEVINSKY AGAIN.

It will be readily understood that I now found life exciting enough to satisfy me. My complications multiplied so fast, without any act of mine, that I had no time to think of the old troubles and disappointments which had so soured Hamylton Tregethner. They had already faded into little more than memories, associated with an existence that I had once lived but had now done with altogether. I was getting rapidly absorbed by the dangers and incidents of the new life.

How completely I had changed the current of opinion about Alexis Petrovitch I had abundant evidence during the next few days, in the form of invitations to houses which had hitherto been closed to me. People also began to remember Olga, and she equally shared in the altered condition of things.

I did not tell her any particulars of my night with the Nihilists, nor of the mission with which I was charged. It would probably only distress her, and could do no good; unless I might find it necessary to use it to compel her to leave Moscow. I questioned her as to her own connections with the Nihilists, and from what she told me I saw that, though they were slight in themselves, they were enough to put her in the power of a woman such as Paula Tueski, and emphatically much more than sufficient to make her arrest a certainty if I were to be arrested, or if anything should happen to throw increased suspicion on me.

Our meeting after her letter to me was a very pleasant one. She came up to me with a smile and begged me again to forgive her. That was not difficult.

"I can speak frankly to a brother now. I couldn't always, you know, Alexis,"—she glanced with roguish severity into my face—"because a few days ago you used to get very bad tempered, and even swear a little. But I'll admit you are improving—in that respect; though I am afraid you are as dogged as ever. But I can be dogged, too; and if I speak frankly now, it is to tell you that nothing you can do will make me go out of Russia until you are safe. You may form what opinion you like of me—though I don't want that to be very bad—but a coward you shall never find me."

"I didn't think you a coward. You know that; you said it in your letter; and I shall not forgive that rudeness of yours, if you persist in this attitude."

"What is the use of a brother if one can't be rude to him, pray? As for your forgiveness, you can't help that now. You've given it. Besides, on reflection, I should not be frightened of you. Will you make me a promise?"

"Yes, if it has nothing to do with your going away."

"It has."

"Then I won't make it. But I'll make a truce. I will not press you to go away, unless I think it necessary for my own safety. Will that do?"

"Yes, I'll go then," she answered readily, holding out her hand to make a bargain of it, as she added: "Mind, if it's necessary for your safety."

"You're as precise as a lawyer," said I, laughing, as I pressed her hand and saw a flush of color tinge her face a moment.

"Now," she said, after a pause, "I have a surprise for you. I have a letter from an old friend of yours—a very old friend."

"An old friend of mine. Oh, I see. An old friend of your brother's, you mean. Well, who is it now? Is there another complication?"

"No, no. An old friend of my new brother's. From Mr. Hamylton Tregethner." She laughed merrily as she stumbled over the old Cornish syllables. "I don't like that Englishman," she added gravely. "Do you know why?"

"Not for the life of me."

"Well, I do not like him; but I can't say why." Her manner was peculiar. "See, here is the passport. Mr. Tregethner has sent it and he seems to have crossed the Russian frontier without the least difficulty. He has gone to Paris by way of Austria. When shall you go?" She did not

look up as she asked this, but stood rummaging among the papers on the table. I took the passport, unfolded and read it mechanically ; then, without thinking, folded it up again and put it away in my pocket.

Evidently she meant it as my dismissal ; and it was very awkward for me to explain that I could not be dismissed in this way because of the difficulties in the road of my leaving. I did not wish to appear to force myself upon her as a brother ; but I could not go first without seeing her in safety ; and there was the crux.

"I'll make my arrangements as soon as I can," I replied, after a longish pause ; and I was conscious of being a little stiff in my manner. "But of course I can't manage things quite as I please. You see, I didn't come into this—I mean, I took up the part and—well, I'm hanged if I know what I do mean ; except that of course I'm sorry to seem to force myself on you longer than you like, but I can't get away quite so easily as you seem to think. I know it puts you in an awkward position, but for the moment I don't for the life of me see how it's to be helped."

As I finished she lifted her head, and her expression was at first grave, until the light of a smile in her blue eyes began to spread over her face, and the corners of her mouth twitched.

"Then you won't be able to go yet ? Of course, it's very awkward, as you say ; but I must manage to put up with it as best I can. In the mean time, as we have to continue the parts, we had better play them so as to mystify people. Don't you agree with this ?"

"Yes, I think that, certainly," I answered, catching her drift, and smiling in my turn.

"Then I am riding this afternoon at three o'clock ; and as it might occasion remark if our afternoon rides were broken off quite suddenly, don't you think it would be very diplomatic if you were to come with me ?"

"Yes, very diplomatic," I assented readily. "But you never told me before that we were in the habit of riding out together every day."

"It hasn't been exactly every afternoon," answered Olga, laughing. "In fact, it's more than a year since the last ride, but the principle of the thing is the same. We ought not to break the continuity."

It was an exceedingly jolly gallop we had. As we rode back we discussed the question of the best course for us to take. We were both too much exhilarated by the ride to take any but a sanguine view ; and so far as I am concerned, I think I talked about it rather as a sort of link between us two than in any serious sense.

When I got to my rooms I was surprised to learn from my servant, Borlas, that my old opponent, Major Devinsky, had called to see me. I did not know he was back in Moscow, though I knew he had been away. I had been at drill that morning—I had quickly fallen into the routine of the work—and had heard nothing of his return. Certainly there was no reason why he should come to me ; though there were many why he should keep away.

He might have watched me into my rooms, for almost before I had changed my riding things, he was announced. He came in smiling, impudent, self assertive, and disposed to be friendly.

"What can you want with me that can induce you to come here?" I asked coldly.

"I want an understanding, Petrovitch."

"Lieutenant Petrovitch, if you please," I interposed.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Lieutenant Petrovitch, I'm sure," he answered lightly. "But there's really no need for this kind of reception. I want to be friends with you."

I bowed as he paused.

"You and I have not understood each other quite in the past."

"Not until within the last few days," I returned significantly.

"I'm not referring to that," he said, flushing. "Though as you've started it I'll pay you the compliment of saying you're devilish neat and clever in your workmanship. I had no idea of it, either, nor any one else——"

"What do you want with me?" I interrupted, with a wave of the hand to stop his compliment.

"I want to talk quietly over with you my suit for your sister's hand. I want to know where we stand, you and I."

"My sister's hand is not mine to give." This very curtly.

"I don't ask you to give it, man; I only want to win it. I am as good a match for her as any man in Moscow;" and with that he launched out into a long account of his wealth, position, and prospects, and of the position his wife would occupy.

I let him talk as long as he would, quite understanding that this was only the preface to something else—the real purpose of his visit. Gradually he drew nearer and nearer to the point, and I saw him eyeing me furtively to note the effect of his words, which he weighed very carefully. He spoke of his family influence; how he could advance my interests; what an advantage it was to have command of wealth when making an army career; and much more, until he showed me that what he really intended was to presume on my old evil reputation and bribe me with money down, if necessary, and with promises of future help if I would agree to let Olga marry him.

"Your proposal, put in plain terms, means," I said bluntly, when he had exhausted his circuitous suggestions, "that you want to buy my consent and assistance. I told you at the start that my sister's hand was not mine to give; neither is it mine to sell, Major Devinsky."

He bent a sharp, calculating look on me as if to judge whether I was in earnest, or merely raising my terms.

"I am not a man easily balked," he said.

"Nor I one easily bribed," I retorted.

"You will have a fortune, and more than a fortune behind you. With skill like yours you can climb to any height you please."

"Sink to any depth you please, you should say," I answered sternly.

"But my sister declines absolutely to be your wife. She dislikes you cordially—as cordially as I do; and no plea that you could offer would induce her to change her mind."

"You weren't always very solicitous about her wishes," he muttered,

with an angry sneer. I didn't understand this allusion; but it made me very angry.

"You are under my roof," I cried hotly. "But even here you will be good enough to put some guard on your speech. It may clear your thoughts to know what my present feelings are." I now spoke with crisp, cutting emphasis. "If my sister could by any art or persuasion be induced to be your wife, I would never consent to exchange another word with her in all my life. As for the veiled bribe you have offered, I allowed you to make it, that I might see how low you would descend. Sooner than accept it, I would break my sword across my knee and turn cabman for a living. But your visit shall have done result—I will tell my sister all that has passed——"

"By heaven, if you dare——"

"All that has passed now, and if she would rather marry than retain her relationship to me, I will retire in your favor. But you will do well not to be hopeful." I could not resist this rather petty little sneer.

"You will live to repent this, Lieutenant Petrovitch."

"At your service," I replied quietly, with a bow.

He was white to the lips with anger when he rose to go, and he seemed as if fighting to keep back the utterance of some hot insult that rose to his lips. But his rage got no farther than ugly looks, and he was still wrestling with his agitation when he left the room.

I could understand his chagrin. He would have dearly liked to force me at the point of the sword to consent, and the knowledge that this was no longer possible, that in some way, which of course he could not understand, I had broken his influence and was no longer afraid of him, galled and maddened him almost beyond endurance. He looked the baffled bully to the life.

It was two days before I had an opportunity of speaking to Olga about it. I had made a rule of seeing her daily, if possible, lest anything should happen that needed explanation by her; but she was away the next day and our daily "business conference" did not take place.

She took the matter very curiously when I did mention it. She was a creature of changing moods, indeed.

"I have a serious matter to speak to you about; something that may perhaps surprise you," I said, when we were riding. "I am the bearer of a message to you. I have to be very much the brother in this; in fact, the head of the family;" and then without much beating about the bush I told her of Devinsky's visit and of his desire to make her his wife.

She listened to me very seriously, scanning my face the while; but did not interrupt me. I had expected a contemptuous and passionate refusal. But her attitude was simply a conundrum. She heard me out to the end with gravity, and when I had finished, reined in her horse and for a full minute stared point blank into my eyes.

Then she laughed lightly, and asked, as she sent her horse forward again: "Do you think I ought to marry him—brother?"

Frankly, I was a good deal disappointed at her conduct. I did not see

why there should be a moment's hesitation about her answer, especially after all she had said to me about the man. And this feeling may perhaps have shown itself in my manner.

"I could do no less than tell you of the proposal, considering that Devinsky believes in the relationship between us," I said. "But I don't see how you, knowing everything, can look to me for the judgment I should have had to give were that relationship real, and I actually head of the family."

This stilted reply seemed to please her, for she glanced curiously at me and then smiled, as I thought almost merrily, or even mischievously, as she replied :

"A proposal of marriage is a very serious thing, Alexis."

"Yes ; so people often find it."

"Major Devinsky is very rich and influential. He is right when he says that his wife would have a very good position in one way in Moscow."

"I wish her much happiness with him," I retorted grimly.

"He is very handsome, too."

I said nothing. She disappointed and vexed me.

"Ah, you men never see other men's good looks. You're very moody," she added, after a pause when she found me still silent.

"I don't admire Major Devinsky," I said rather sullenly.

She laughed so heartily at this and seemed evidently so pleased that I wished I had found the laugh less musical. Next, she looked at me again thoughtfully before she spoke as if to weigh the effect of her words.

"It would be greatly to your advantage, too, Alexis, to have Major Devinsky——"

"Thank you," I cut in shortly. "I do not seek Major Devinsky's patronage. When I cannot climb or stand without it, I'll fall, and quite contentedly, even if I break my neck. Shall we get on?" And I urged my horse to a quick trot.

My evident irritation at her suggestion—for I could not hear the matter without showing my resentment—seemed to please her as much as anything, for she smiled as her nag cantered easily at my side. But I would not look at her. If she meant to marry Devinsky I meant what I had said to him. I would have no more to do with the business, and I would get out of Russia as soon as possible the best way I could.

A sidelong glimpse that I caught of Olga's face after a while showed me that the look of laughing pleasure had died away and had given place to a thoughtful and rather stern expression. "Making up her mind," was my thought ; and then having a stretch of road ahead, I quickened up my horse's speed to a hard gallop and we had a quick burst at a rattling pace.

When we pulled up and stood to breathe our horses before turning their heads homewards, the girl's cheeks were all aglow with ruddy color and her eyes dancing with the excitement of the gallop. She made such a picture of beautiful womanhood that I was forced to gaze at her in sheer admiration.

We had not spoken since I had closed the last bit of dialogue and now she maneuvered her horse quite close to me and said :

"Alexis, did you bring that proposal to me deliberately?"

"Yes. It was scarcely a question I could answer for you."

"Couldn't you?" Her eyes rested on mine with an expression that at another time I should have read as reproach. "Did you think there could be any but one answer?"

"No, I didn't. But one never knows," I said, remembering what she had said just before the gallop.

"Don't you? Well, you must think we Russian women are poor stuff! One day, ready to sneak off in disgraceful cowardice; and the next, willing to marry an utterly despicable wretch because he has money and influence and position. Do you mean to tell me that you, acting as my brother, actually let this man make this proposition in cold blood, and did not hurl him out of your rooms? You!"

I stared at her in sheer amazement at the change, and could find not a word to say. Nor was there any need. Now that her real feelings had forced themselves to words she had plenty, and for some minutes she did nothing but utter protestation after protestation of her hatred and contempt of Devinsky; while her hits at me for having been the mouthpiece of the man were many and hard. What angered her was, she said, to feel that the smallest doubt of her intention had been left in Devinsky's mind; and it was not till I told her much more particularly and exactly all that had passed on this point that she was satisfied.

We had ridden some way homewards when her mood changed again, and laughter once more prevailed.

"So you told him I must choose between him and—my brother; or rather my present relationship to you?"

"I told him I would never speak to you again if you married him."

"Well, I have chosen," she replied at once. "I shall not give up—my brother." And with that she pricked up her nag and we rattled along fast, her cheeks growing ruddier and ruddier than ever with the exercise.

I couldn't follow her change of mood; but I was heartily glad she had decided to have nothing to do with Devinsky. She was far too good a girl to be wasted on him.

CHAPTER X.—"THAT BUTCHER, DURESCO."

WE were not by any means done with Devinsky yet, and I was to have striking proof of this a couple of days later. I met him in the interval as men in the same regiment are bound to meet; and I deemed it best to avoid all open rupture, seeing that he was my superior officer, and unpleasant consequences to others beside myself might result.

I told him shortly that Olga declined his offer and that it must never be renewed. He took it coolly enough, replying only that his feelings for her would never change, nor should he abandon the resolve to make her his wife. Then as he made overtures of peace and apologized for what he had said, I thought it discreet to patch up a sort of treaty of mutual tolerance.

I was speaking of this to Essaieff, to whom in common with all the mess

Deviusky's infatuation for Olga was perfectly well known, and my former second seemed particularly impressed by it. Since the duel I had seen more of him than of any other man, and I liked him. I could be with him more safely than with others, moreover, because he had seen so little of the unregenerate Alexis. Every man who had been at all intimate with my former self I now avoided altogether, because of the risk of detection—although this risk was of course diminishing with every day that passed.

"I don't like what you say, Petrovitch," said Essaieff, after he had thought it over. "I'm convinced Devinsky's a dangerous man; and if he attempts to make things up with you, depend upon it he's got some ugly reason behind."

"A reason in petticoats," said I lightly. "A brother's a charming fellow—to a man in love with the sister."

"No doubt; but he thought he was going to kill the 'charming fellow' in that duel. Why did he go away; and where did he go?"

"He didn't tell me his private business, naturally."

"Yet I'm much mistaken if it didn't in some way concern you."

"I don't see how."

"We don't see the sun at midnight, man; but that's only because there's something in the line of sight. Other people can see it clearly enough."

"Well, I don't see this sun, any way; and I'm not going to worry about it."

"Have you ever heard of Durescq? Alexandre Durescq?" he asked after a pause.

"No, never," I answered promptly, making one of those slips which it was impossible for me to avoid in my private chats. Essaieff's next words showed me my blunder.

"My dear fellow, you must have heard of him. Durescq, the duelist. The man who has the reputation of being the best swordsman in the Russian army. The French fellow who was naturalized and clapped a 'c' into his name and cut off the tail of it to make Duresque into Durescq. Why, he was here last year and dined with us at the mess. Devinsky brought him. You had joined us then, surely, and must have been introduced by Devinsky. You must remember him."

"Oh, that Durescq!" I exclaimed, as if recalling the incident.

"That Durescq!" There's no other for the whole Russian army," said Essaieff dryly. "And if he heard you say it, he'd want an explanation quick enough."

"I was thinking for a minute of another Duresque, Essaieff, whom I knew much better. Different sex, whose killing of men was in a different way." I smiled as I made the equivocation.

"I met him this morning," said my companion, noticing my remark and looking more thoughtful than before. "I wonder if Devinsky's absence has anything to do with Durescq's presence, and whether——" He paused and looked at me. "It would be a damnably ugly business; but Devinsky's not incapable of it; and so far as I know, the other man's worse. Moreover, I

know they have been together in more than one very dirty affair. But this would be murder—sheer, deliberate, damnable murder—and nothing else.”

I had rarely seen him so excited as he was now.

“You think Devinsky has brought this man here to do what he couldn’t do himself the other morning?” I asked.

“I don’t say I think it,” replied Essaieff cautiously. “I shouldn’t like to think it of any man; but if I were you I’d be a bit cautious about getting into a quarrel.”

“Caution be hanged,” I cried. “If that’s their game I’ll force the pace for them. We’ll have a real fight next time, Essaieff. But I’ll have one condition, and one only—that Devinsky meets me first.”

“What a fire devil you’ve turned, Alexis,” said Essaieff enthusiastically. It was the first time he had used my Christian name, and it pleased me. “Even the rankers have found you out now. ‘That devil, Alexis,’ is what they call you one to the other, since you beat their best men in leaping, and running, and staff playing. If the war comes, as like good Russians we pray it may, what a record you’ll make. They’ll follow you anywhere. Yet, there’s shrewdness enough in your last devilment. If you insist on first killing Devinsky, Durescq will probably take back a bloodless sword to the capital.

His pithy reference to the feeling in the regiment touched my vanity on its weak spot, and gave me quite disproportionate pleasure. As we talked over this possible plan of Devinsky’s I tried to get him to speak of the feeling again. It is rather a paltry confession to make; but the nickname, ‘That devil, Alexis,’ was exactly what I would have wished to bear.

Although Essaieff had suggested this action on the part of Devinsky, I scarcely thought it possible that he would do what we had discussed; but I had not been many minutes in the club that evening before the thing seemed not only probable, but certain; and I saw that I had a very ugly corner to turn.

Alexandre Durescq was there, and I eyed him curiously. He was taller than I by an inch, but not so broad. His figure was well knit and lithe, and he moved with the air which a man gets whose sinews are of steel and are kept in perfect condition by constant and severe training.

His face was a most unpleasant one. The features were thin and all very long; and the thinness added to the apparent abnormal length from brow to chin. His complexion was almost Mongolian in its sallowness; his hair coal black, and his eyes, set close to his large and very prominent aquiline nose, were small but brilliant in expression and seemingly coal black in color. Altogether a most remarkable looking man; and I was not astonished that Essaieff had been surprised when I said I had forgotten him. He was not a man to be forgotten.

The expression of his face was sardonic and saturnine, and his manners and gestures were all saturated with intense self assertiveness. He moved, looked, and spoke as though he felt that every one was at once beneath him and afraid of him.

He was at the far end of the room when I entered, and I saw Devinsky stoop

and whisper to him immediately he caught sight of me. The man turned slightly and glanced in my direction, and my instincts warned me of danger.

I would not balk the pair; but I would not provoke the quarrel. I moved quietly about the room, chatting with one man and another, but keeping a wary eye disengaged for the two at the other end. Gradually I worked my way round to where they were, and both rose as I approached. I saw, too, that Devinsky's old seconds and toadies were near and were watching me and smirking. They formed a group of three or four men who seemed to have an intimation of what was coming. They were waiting to see me "jumped."

I knew, however, that if I kept quiet I should make the task more difficult for the pair, and thus compel Devinsky to show his hand, and so give me the pretext I needed to force the first fight on him.

"Good evening, Petrovitch, or Lieutenant Petrovitch, I suppose I should say," said Devinsky, and the instant he spoke I could tell he had been drinking. "I think you've met my friend, Captain Durescq?"

"Not yet," I said, looking straight into Devinsky's eyes with a meaning he read and didn't like.

"Is this the gentleman who is so particular in asserting his lieutenantcy? Good evening, Lieutenant Petrovitch." He said this in a tone that was insufferably insolent; and as if to point the insult, the two toadies, when they heard it, sniggered audibly.

Nothing could have played better into my hands. All four made an extraordinary blunder, since they showed, before I had opened my lips, that the object was to force a quarrel; and thus the sympathies of every decent man in the place were on my side. I kept cool. I was too wary to take fire yet.

"I thought you knew Captain Durescq when he was here last year," said Devinsky. "But you may have forgotten."

"Good evening, Captain Durescq," said I, ignoring Devinsky and returning the other man's greeting. "What is the latest war news in St. Petersburg?"

"Bad for those who do not like fighting," he said, looking at me in a way that turned this to a personal insult.

"But good, perhaps, for those soldiers whose swords are to hire," I returned, with a smile which did not make my point less plain.

The man's eyes flashed.

"They will take the place of your friends who do not like the fighting," I added; and to this all about us grew suddenly silent.

"My friends? How do you mean?" asked Durescq stiffly.

"Those whom you mentioned in your first sentence. Whom else should I mean?" and I let my eye rest as if by accident on Devinsky.

"You have a singular manner of expressing yourself, lieutenant."

"We provincials do not always copy the manners of the capital, you know," I returned in my pleasantest manner. "I think the provinces are growing more and more independent every year. We arrange our own affairs in our own way, have our own etiquette, form our own associations, and settle our own quarrels without aid from the capital."

I heard Devinsky swear softly into his mustache at this ; but there was nothing for them to take hold of, though every man in the room understood what I meant ; and nearly all were now listening.

" Yes, I have heard you have singular manners in the provinces. My friend here, Devinsky, has told me several curious things. I heard of one provincial, for instance, who allowed himself to be insulted and browbeaten till his cowardice was almost a byword, and it became really impossible for him to remain in the army unless he accepted the challenge he had so often refused. And then he begged, almost with tears, to get terms made ; and when this was not done, he deadened his fears with drink, and came to the club here like a witless fool, behaving like a drunken clown ; and then at last actually went out and fought in a condition of seeming delirium. We do not have that in the capital. In St. Petersburg we should have such a scabby rascal whipped on a gun."

A movement among the group of toadies showed me how this burlesque of my conduct was appreciated there, while Devinsky was grinning boastfully.

" Did Major Devinsky tell you that ? " I asked, my voice down at least two tones in my excitement, while my pulses thrilled at the insult. But outwardly I was calm.

" Yes, I think that's a pretty fair description, isn't it, Devinsky ? " replied Durescq, turning coolly to the other for confirmation. Then he turned again to me and asked, " Why, do you recognize the description, Lieutenant Petrovitch ? "

" You have not heard the whole of the story," I answered, getting the words out with difficulty between teeth I had to clench hard to keep my passion under control. " The man who was beaten in the duel left Moscow in a panic and went to St. Petersburg for a purpose—that you may perhaps approve." There was now dead silence in all the room and the eyes of every man in it were riveted on me. " The first object of the duel was that he might kill in it the man whose skill was thought to be inferior to his own, so that he might persecute with his disgusting attentions the sister of him on whom he had purposely fixed the quarrel. Failing in this, he went to fetch a cleverer sword than his own with which to do his dirty work ; and he fetched——" I paused a second and then my rage burst out like a volcano—" He fetched a butcher named Durescq to do butcher's work ; and I, by heaven, won't balk him."

With this I lost all control, and springing upon Durescq I seized his nose and wrung it and twisted it, dragging his head from side to side in my ungovernable fury, until I nearly broke my teeth with the straining force with which I clenched them. Then, raising my hand, I slapped his face with a force and loudness that resounded through the room and made every man start and wonder what would come next.

" That is from the man you say dare not fight. One last word. Before I meet the butcher, I insist on meeting the man who hired him. Lieutenant Essaieff will act for me."

With that I left the room, feeling that although I was now all but certain

to be killed by Durescq, I should at least die as became "that devil, Alexis."

CHAPTER XI.—DANGER FROM A FRESH SOURCE.

I WALKED home with a feeling of rare exhilaration. Whatever happened, this was my own quarrel, and I had so acted as to secure the sympathy of all who knew the facts. The quarrel had been fixed on me in public in a manner peculiarly disgraceful to both my opponents, and if they killed me it would be murder.

If on the other hand I could kill either or both, the world would be sweeter and purer for its riddance of them. Moreover, I had so arranged matters that I saw how I should have at least an equal chance of my life. I should have the choice of weapons, and I would fight Devinsky with swords and the "butcher" with pistols.

I thought much about Durescq's skill. He had a huge reputation both as a swordsman and a shot; but I was very confident in my own skill with the sword, and inclined to doubt whether he could beat me even with that. But in the end I decided not to run that risk. The issue should be left to chance. One should be loaded, and one unloaded; and a toss should settle which each should have. We would then stand at arm's length, the barrel of one man's weapon touching the other's forehead. The man to whom fortune gave the loaded weapon would thus be bound to blow the other's brains out, whether he had any skill or not.

About an hour later, Essaieff came to me and told me that the whole regiment was in a state of excitement about the fight, and that feeling against Devinsky had reached a positively dangerous pitch, especially when it was known that he had practically refused to meet me. That point was still unsettled, and Essaieff had come to get my final decision.

"My advice is, stand firm," he said. "You're in the right. There isn't an unprejudiced man in the whole army who wouldn't say you were acting well within your rights; just as, I must say, my dear fellow, you've acted splendidly throughout."

I told him what I had been thinking.

"It seems a ghastly thing to put a life on the spin of a coin," he commented.

"Better than to have it ended without a chance, by the thrust of a butcher's knife."

"That name will stick to Durescq always," he said, with a slow smile. "It was splendid. Do you know you made me hold my breath while you were at him. He *is* a butcher."

"Do you say Devinsky won't meet me?" I asked.

"No, not that he won't; but he raises the excuse that as Durescq's challenge was given first—as it was indeed—the order of the duels must follow the order of the challenges. But they arranged the challenges purposely in that order."

"I shan't hold to the point," I said, after a moment's consideration. "If

they insist I shall give way and meet Durescq first. But this will only make it the more easy for us to insist on our plan of fighting. Don't give way on that. I am resolved that one of us shall fall ; and chance shall settle which."

Essaieff tried to persuade me to insist on meeting Devinsky first ; but I would not.

"No. He shan't carry back to St. Petersburg the tale that we in Moscow are ready to bluster in words, and then daren't make them good in our acts."

"I hope he'll carry back no tale at all to St. Petersburg," answered my friend grimly ; and then he left me.

I completed what few preparations I had to make in view of the very probably fatal issue of the fight ; wrote a letter to Olga and inclosed one to Balestier, as I had done before ; and was just getting off to bed, when Essaieff came back to report.

His message had added to the already great excitement, and there had been at first the most strenuous opposition to our plan of fighting. But he had forced his way, and the meetings—with the "butcher" first, and if I did not fall Devinsky afterwards—were fixed for eight o'clock. He promised to come for me half an hour before that time ; and he urged me to get to bed and to have as much sleep as possible to steady my nerves.

They were steady enough already. I gloated over the affair ; and I meant so to use it as to set the seal to my reputation as "that devil, Alexis," whether I lived or died. But after all I was balked. I slept soundly enough till Borlas called me early in the morning and told me strange news. A file of soldiers were in my rooms, and the sergeant had requested me to be roused at once, as he had an important message.

I called the man into my bedroom and asked him what he wanted.

"You are to consider yourself under arrest, lieutenant," he said, saluting, and drawing himself up stiffly, "and in my charge."

"What for?"

"I don't know, lieutenant. I had my orders from the colonel himself first thing ; and if you please, I am to prevent your leaving the house. You'll understand my position, sir. Will you give me your word not to attempt to leave?"

"Where are your written orders?" I knew the man well and he liked me.

"My orders are verbal, lieutenant ; but very strict and imperative."

"Privately, do you know anything of the cause of this?"

"You'll have a letter from the colonel, I think, lieutenant, within an hour, requiring you to go to him. Major Devinsky is also confined to his quarters, sir ; and also I think Captain Durescq. We've heard in the regiment, sir, what happened at the officers' club last night." A certain look on his lined, bearded face, and in his eyes as he saluted me when he said this, told me much.

I chafed at the interference, and anathematized the colonel for having apparently taken a hand in the matter. This butcher would now be able to

go back to St. Petersburg with a lying, garbled tale that we in Moscow got out of quarrels by clinging to the coat tails of our commanding officers; and it made me mad. I tried to persuade the sergeant to let me out to go to the place of meeting, promising to be back within an hour, but he was immovable.

"I would if I dared, lieutenant; but I dare not. I'm not the man to stop a fair fight, and I hate this work. But duty's duty."

When Essaieff came, he threw new light on the matter. The affair had caused a huge commotion. In the early hours of the morning he had been summoned to the colonel, who had in some way got wind of the affair, a very ugly version having been told him. My friend had to tell the plain truth, and there had been the devil to pay. The wires to St. Petersburg had been kept going through the night, the whole thing had been laid before headquarters at the Ministry of War; and the arrest of the three principals had been ordered from the capital.

Soon afterwards a peremptory summons came for me from the colonel and when I got to him I found both Devinsky and Durescq there, together with two or three of the highest officers then stationed in Moscow. A sort of informal examination took place, out of which I am bound to say both the other men came very badly; and in the end we were all three ordered off to stay in our quarters under arrest. I found that not only were we not allowed to go out—sentries being posted in my rooms all the time—but no one was permitted to enter; nor could I communicate with a single individual for two days.

At the end of that time the order came for me to resume duty; and as soon as the morning's drill was over, the colonel sent for me and told me what had happened. The military authorities at St. Petersburg had taken the harshest view of the conduct of my two antagonists. It was regarded as a deliberate plot to kill. Devinsky had been cashiered; and only Durescq's great influence had prevented him from sharing the same fate. As it was he had had all his seniority struck off, had been reduced to the rank of a subaltern, and sent off there and then under quasi arrest, with heavy military escort, to a regiment stationed on the most southern Turkestan frontier.

"As for Devinsky, the regiment's well rid of him," said the colonel, with such emphasis and earnestness that I saw his own personal animosity had had quite as much to do with the man's overthrow as the latter's own conduct. But it pleased the old man to put it all down to me, and when we were parting he shook hands cordially and said, "The regiment owes you a vote of thanks, my boy; and I'll see that it's paid in full."

"One question I should like to ask," said I. "How did you get to hear of it all?"

"The news was everybody's property, lad—don't ask questions," he replied with dry inconsequence. And would say no more.

But I was soon to learn, and the news surprised me as much as any part of the whole strange incident.

The first use I made of my liberty was to go and see Olga and explain my

absence and all that had happened. She had heard a somewhat garbled account of it in which the part I played had been much exaggerated, and she received me with the greatest tenderness and sympathy, and even tears of what seemed pleasure, but she explained as cold, glistened in her eyes. We had a long and closely confidential chat; and she made me feel, more by her trustful manner and gentle attitude than by her actual words, how much she had missed me during the days of our separation and how thankful she was to be free of Devinsky for good, and how much she felt she owed to me on that account.

For myself I was sorry when I had to leave her. She was the only person in Moscow to whom I could speak without restraint; a fact that made our interviews so welcome that I was loathe to end this one.

It was almost dusk when I left, and as I walked home I was thoughtful and preoccupied. The question of Olga's safety was pressing very hardly on me and made me extremely anxious. The more I saw of her the more eager I was to get her out of harm's way; and the consciousness that she must share the consequences of any disaster that might happen to me were I discovered troubled me greatly. I was beginning to anticipate more vividly, moreover, the coming of some such disaster. The time was passing very quickly. It was getting on for nearly three weeks since the Nihilist meeting, and I knew that my Nihilist "allies" would be growing anxious for a sign of my zeal. They were probably well aware that I was doing nothing to redeem my pledge.

There was also the undeniable danger inseparably connected with the infernal intrigue with Paula Tueski. I had so neglected her in my character of lover that I was hourly expecting some proof of her indignation. I had only seen her twice in the three weeks; and each time in public; and though Olga and she had interchanged visits, I knew perfectly well that she was not the woman to take neglect passively.

I blamed myself warmly, too, for my own inactivity. My whole policy had been to try and gain time, and yet I had made no use of it, except to get into broils which had increased the already bewildering complications.

That this would be the effect of my quarrel with Devinsky and Durescq, I could not doubt when I came to think the matter over in cool blood. I had been the means of getting them ruined; and naturally every friend they had in Russia would take part against me. I knew that Durescq had friends among the most powerful circles in Russia, and I had nothing to oppose to their anger save the poor position of a lieutenant in a marching regiment, and a past that was full of blackguardism and evil repute. Personally this was all nothing to me; but when I thought of the indirect results it might have for Olga it troubled and worried me deeply.

Everything pointed to one conclusion—that Olga should leave Russia while she could do so in safety.

I was meditating on these things when a girl stopped me suddenly, asking if I were Lieutenant Petrovitch. She then gave me a scrap of paper; and I glanced at it and read:

"The old rendezvous, at once. Urgent. P. T."

I questioned the girl as to who gave it to her, and where the person was ; but getting no satisfactory account, dismissed her with a few kopecks.

It beat me. Obviously it was from Paula Tueski. Equally obviously it was an appointment at which she had seemingly something to say of importance. But where the deuce the "old rendezvous" was I knew no more than the dead.

I am not one to waste time over the impossible ; and as I certainly could not go to a place I did not know of, I tore the letter into shreds and went on home.

I let myself in and found that my servant was out—a most unusual thing at that time of the day ; but I had begun to fear that the man was below rather than above the average of Russian servants and was already contemplating his dismissal. I did not attach much importance to his present absence, however ; and throwing myself into a chair sat and thought, or tried to think, of some scheme by which I could induce Olga to leave the country, and some means by which her departure could be safely arranged. She must go at once. She had promised me to go when I could tell her it was necessary for my safety ; and I could truthfully say that now. If she would go, I would have a dash for liberty myself.

While I was thinking in this strain some one knocked at my outer door, and when I opened it, to my surprise, Paula Tueski rushed in quickly.

A glance at her face showed me she was in an exceedingly ill temper ; as indeed it appeared to me she generally was.

"Where is your servant ?" was her first question, hurriedly asked.

"I really don't know. Out somewhere ; but——"

"His absence means danger, Alexis. Why didn't you come to me when I sent a message to you just now ? You read it, questioned the girl, and then tore it up and threw it in the gutter ; and all this as unconcernedly as if you did not know full well that from our window you must be in full view of me. Are you always going to scorn me ?"

I took care to show no surprise ; but it was clear I had blundered badly, and that the rendezvous was close to the spot where the paper had been given to me.

"I could not come. I had to hurry home. I——"

"Bah ! Don't trifle with me like that. Haven't you had enough of your prison during the last two days ?"

"You know the news, then ?" said I, following her gladly off the track.

"It is you who do not know the news. Ah, Alexis, you are giving me more trouble in this new character of yours than ever you did in the old one—much as you harassed me then."

"What do you mean about new character ?" I asked. Her phrase had startled me.

"I like it better than the old. Fifty thousand times better 'that devil, Alexis,' than 'that rouse, Petrovitch.' But whenever I think of the change, I cannot understand it ; I don't understand you. I could almost swear, sometimes, you are not the same man." She came close up to me and putting her hands on my shoulders, stared long and earnestly right into my

eyes. "And then I wonder how I can have been so blind as not to have seen all that lay hidden in you ; all that was noble and brave and daring. But I love you, Alexis, twenty thousand times more than ever ; and to have saved your life now is a thought of infinite sweetness to me."

I stared back as if she had stung me.

"Do you mean you had anything to do with——" I stopped, and she knew what I meant. She smiled, and in a voice exquisitely sweet and tender, though hateful to me, she answered :

"Your life is mine, Alexis ! Do you think I would let that butcher from St. Petersburg take it ? Let him keep to his own shambles. Yes, I set the wires in motion, and I did not stop until the one man was utterly ruined and the other degraded in the eyes of all Russia. Your life is mine, Alexis"—she seemed to revel in this hateful phrase—"and those who would strike at you must reckon with me as well. We are destined for each other, you and I ; and we live or die together."

"You have done me a foul wrong, then," I cried hotly. "You have disgraced me ; made me out for a braggart that provokes a fight and then shirks it by screening myself behind the law. Do you suppose I thank you for that ?" I spoke as sternly as I felt. But she only smiled as she answered :

"I did not think of your feelings. This man would have killed you. His hands are bloody to the armpits. Do you think I would let him find another victim in you when I could stop him and save you ? Did you not reproach me when I did not interfere before, and tell me my love was cold ? Would I suffer such a reproach again, think you ? No, no. Your life is mine I repeat, and for the future I will protect it whether you will or no. That is how I love ; and so it shall be always. I have come now to warn you. Hush ! What is that ?"

I listened and heard some one moving in the lobby of my rooms.

"It is Borlas returned," I said, and opening the door called him. Getting no answer I called him again loudly ; and then my visitor whispered to me to come back. But I paid no heed to her, and went forward a few steps to go into my servant's rooms. As I did so, a desperate rush was made and three men, disguised, dashed at me violently. They had gained an entrance somehow and were no doubt making their way to attack me in my room or were going to lay in wait for me, when my quick ears heard them and thus spoiled their plans.

I was unarmed, and in a moment saw the foolishness of attempting to fight three men, probably armed, while I had not so much as a stick. Making a feint of an attack upon the nearest, therefore, I jumped aside and darted back into the room I had just left, closing the door instantly behind me, while my companion and I held it shut until I had secured it.

Then I turned to her for an explanation.

"They are my husband's agents," she whispered. "He suspects us, as you know ; and he arranged this attack, thinking that if you were killed, the act just at this juncture would be set down to Devinsky's revenge. I came on purpose to warn you. If they catch me here now, we are both ruined beyond all hope."

"Then they shan't catch us," I replied. "Or if they do, they shan't live to carry the tale outside the door;" and I proceeded to put in execution a plan which had already occurred to me.

CHAPTER XII.—CHRISTIAN TUESKI.

WHILE the men were straining and fighting to gain admission to the room, I loaded my revolver, seized a heavy stick that lay in a corner, and opening the window noiselessly, with some little trouble and agility got into the street. I let myself into the house, and then I thundered at the outer door of my own rooms as if seeking immediate admission.

Instantly there was a great scuffling within, and I knew that the men were making off by the back, in the probable belief that they had been disturbed by some unexpected caller. Judging the time as best I could, so that I might perhaps catch one of them, I rushed in suddenly. One had fled, the second was in the act of dropping from a window, while a third was just clambering out.

I struck this one a blow on the head which laid him senseless in a heap on the floor, and leaning out, was in time to give the second a whack that must have nearly broken his arm. Then without wasting a moment I bound the other and closely bandaged his eyes.

Telling Paula Tueski that I had scared the rascals away, I dragged the fellow to the light that she might recognize him. She identified him directly, and without a word being spoken except by me, I thrust him into a dark closet and turned the key on him while I settled what to do next.

"You knew him, I could see," I said, when I joined my visitor again. "Is he a police spy?"

"No, not in the ordinary sense. I have seen him with my husband; but exactly what he is I don't know. I believe he is one of a small band of really villainous men, used for especially ugly work."

"But why am I marked out for a visit from them?"

"I believe my husband has suspected you—on my account. I know he hates you cordially. You remember that affair in the Opera lobby, when you insulted him so grossly?" I nodded; but of course I had not the remotest idea what she meant. "He never forgives. Since then he has been accumulating every jot and tittle of fact against you—and you have given him plenty, Alexis—and if he can work your overthrow, he will."

"Yes; but why try to get me assassinated. I'll go at once and ask him," I said, readily and impulsively.

"Are you mad?" exclaimed my companion.

"On the contrary, I'll go and show him the danger of interfering with me. Where is he to be found now?"

"At home. He will not leave for an hour yet to make his evening visit to the bureau. But he will never consent to see you."

"At any rate I'll try; and I'm much mistaken if I don't force him. I have a plan," I added, after a minute's thought. "I will clear us both at a stroke. Go at once to my sister, and tell her from me that I wish her to

come back here with you and wait for me. Mind, too, should any one come to fetch away that fellow I've locked up, let Olga say enough in his presence to make it clear that she was here with us when the attack was first made. Be quick and careful; for much will depend on all this being well done."

I drove rapidly to the place and sending in my card asked for an immediate interview with the chief of police on urgent business. The reply came back that M. Tueski could not see me; I was to call at his office. I sent the messenger back with a peremptory reply that I must see him, as I had discovered an assassination plot. I was still refused admittance, though a longer wait showed me he had considered the matter carefully.

This time I wrote a brief note: "One of your hired assassins has been identified, has confessed, and lies at this moment bound and in my power. If you do not see me now I shall communicate direct with the Ministry of the Interior."

That proved the "open sesame," and in a few moments I was ushered into the presence of one of the most hated men in Russia—the man I had been commissioned to kill.

He was small, with a face that would have been common looking but for its extraordinarily hard and cold expression. It was lined and seamed; and each line might have been drawn by nature with the express object of marking an absolutely merciless, calculating, and emotionless man.

His eyes were very bright as they fixed themselves on me, and his voice harsh, high pitched, and tuneless.

"Men don't belie your new character when they call you daring," was his greeting. He was standing by the side of a long table with his black clothed figure outlined against the soft colors of luxuriant tapestries with which the walls were hung. He motioned me to a chair, near enough to be within the demands of courtesy to an officer bearing the emperor's commission and far enough removed from him to be safe should the visitor turn out to be dangerous. I noticed, too, that an electric bell button was well within reach. "What do you wish with me, lieutenant? This visit is unusual."

"I am not accustomed to bother about what is usual where my life is concerned," I answered firmly. "I want a reply to a plain question. Why do you send your bravoës to assassinate me?"

"I have sent no bravoës to assassinate you, lieutenant. I don't understand you. We don't hire assassins." As though the whole thing were ridiculous.

"Yet your wife recognized this man instantly."

"My wife!" he exclaimed, with a sufficient change to show how this had touched him.

"Yes. Your wife. She was in my rooms when these men came."

He drew in a deep breath while he looked at me with eyes of hate. I had got right between the joints of his armor of impassivity. It was a cruel thrust; but I had an ugly game to play, and was forced to hit hard.

He seemed to struggle to repress his private feelings and to remain the impassive official. But human nature and his jealousy beat him, and his next question came with a jerk that showed the effort behind it.

"What was she doing there?" His tone was the essence of harsh bitterness.

"What was she doing there?" I echoed, as if in the greatest astonishment. "Why, what should she be doing but calling with my sister? They are there now, keeping guard over your—assistant."

He turned away for a moment to prevent my seeing in his face the relief which I could hear in his voice as he answered:

"You are an even bolder man than I thought."

"I don't understand you, of course; but I have need to be bold," I retorted, "with you against me ready to plan my private execution. They're heavy odds. But now, perhaps, you'll answer my question. Why do you do this?"

"There might be many reasons—if it were true," he answered in the same curt tone he had first used.

"One's enough for me, if it's true," I replied, copying his sharp manner.

He stood a minute looking at me in silence, and then sat down.

"I think I've been doing you an injustice, lieutenant," he said presently. "I thought when you forced your way into my presence you might be coming to assassinate me. But I see now you're not such a fool as to try to do anything of that kind when you have left a broad trail behind you that would lead to your certain detection. You are young; with all the weaknesses of youth strongly developed—rash, hot headed, sometimes tipsy, a fool with women, and when necessary, a knave too, loose in money matters and unscrupulous, a gambler, a dicer, and a bankrupt in morals, religion, and honor. But shrewd—for you've deceived every one about your sword skill and your courage—and under the garb of a worthless fellow you have a cool, calculating, and yet daredevil head that should make your fortune. Others are more right about you than I."

"Others?" I asked, interested and amused by this quiet enumeration of the results of the analysis of two very different, but united characters. "Who are the others?"

A faint ghost of what in another man would have been a smile relaxed the grim, hard, straight lips for an instant, in mockery of my attempt to draw him out.

"You are not unknown, lieutenant, as you may find soon; but you are a fool to mix yourself up with the Nihilists."

It was my turn now to be on the defensive.

"That is a charge which a child can make and the wisest man can sometimes fail to rebut," I answered sharply. "I am not a Nihilist."

He waved his hand as if my repudiation were not worth a serious thought.

"I can make you a career, if you will. If you will act under me——"

"Thank you," I returned coldly. "I know what you can do. You can put me first on the list for some task which will insure my being served as you meant me to be served today. One commission is enough for me, and I prefer the emperor's."

"You don't know what you say, nor what you refuse."

"All the more reason for not regretting my refusal," I retorted lightly.

"But this does not answer my question—why do you seek to have me assassinated?"

"Siberia is getting overpopulated," he returned, manifestly angry at my refusal.

"You mean it's easier to kill than to exile."

"One must have some regard for its morals, too," he sneered, with a contempt at which my rage took fire.

I looked at him with a light in my eyes which he could read plainly enough.

"You are a coward, M. Tueski," said I sternly; "because you presume upon the office you hold to say things which, without the protection that guards you, you would not dare to let between your teeth."

"It is useless to talk in that strain to me," he said shortly. "I know you."

"No—by heaven you don't—yet. But I'll let you know something of me now. Men say you know no fear; that your loves, desires, emotions, are all dead—all, save ambition. I'll test that. This plot you have laid against my life is your own private revenge for some fancied wrong. You have sought to carry it out even at the very moment when you had had a hint to guard me. It was cunningly laid, and nearly succeeded; and then you would have set the blame down at Devinsky's door."

He listened without making a sign; quite impassively. But the mere fact that he did listen showed me I was striking the right note, and further that he wished to see what I meant to do.

"Go on," he said contemptuously, when I paused.

"I can prove this; aye, and I will prove it, even if I go to the emperor himself; and prove it—by your own wife." He could not wholly conceal the effect of this. He knew the strength of the threat.

"More than that," I cried then, quickening my speech and showing much more passion. "You know what the world says about me and your wife. You showed me you knew it, when I told you just now that she was in my rooms when your men came to try to take my life. You have dared to smirch my honor in regard to women; and you have lied. So far as your wife is concerned, there has never been a thought of mine toward her tainted with dishonor. So far as I am concerned she is virgin pure. But, by heaven, beware how you taunt me! It lies with you to say whether her reputation shall be safe after——"

I left the sentence unfinished, and the change in the man's manner showed me how he was inwardly shrinking and wincing at my desperate words.

"Go on. What do you want?" He spoke after a great effort and strove to keep his voice at the dead level of official 'lifelessness. But the man was an inward fire of rage and jealousy.

"This duel is not my seeking, but yours, M. Tueski," I continued. "And for my part I would as soon have a truce. But if we are to fight on, I will use every weapon I can lay my hand on—and use them desperately. You can prove the truth of what I say. Send round some one to my rooms and fetch away the scoundrel who is there. My sister will let him go. Your

wife, her friend, is staying with her to help in case of need. And if she were guilty, I should not give her to my sister for a friend."

"You are the devil!" The words forced themselves through his teeth.

I had picked my words deliberately; and it was the shrewdest thing I could have done. He left the room without another word, going through a doorway behind him; and calling to some one he whispered some instructions.

"You have sent? You are right," I said, when he returned. "And now call off these bloodhounds of yours; and so long as you play fair with me, my sister and your wife can be friends. And no longer. One other condition. Give me two police permits to cross the frontier on special business—one for myself and one for my sister. You may not be sorry if I decide to take a holiday."

"I cannot give them, and you cannot leave," he answered.

"Write me the permits. I'll see about using them."

"No; I cannot write them. If I did, they would be canceled tomorrow by the Ministry of the Interior."

"Why?"

"The fact is what I say. You cannot leave Russia."

"I care nothing for that. Write them—or we resume this duel, M. Tueski."

He was a changed man. He was so accustomed to exact implicit obedience to his will, and to ride rough shod over every one about him, that now he was beaten, his collapse was utter and complete. He was absolutely overcome by the pressure I could threaten and he thought I was blackguard enough to apply.

For once at least my old black character did me a good turn. He acted like a weak child now, entirely subjugated by my will. He wrote the permits as I directed.

As he was writing it occurred to me there must be some influence behind the scenes which told with him. Else, why did he not forthwith write out the order for my imprisonment? He had done it hundreds of times before in the case of men infinitely more influential than myself. His signature would open the doors of any prison in Russia. It suggested itself that it was this reason which was at the bottom of the attempt to get me killed. He dared not follow out his own desire.

"One thing puzzles me," I said coolly, as I took the permits. "Why haven't you, instead of writing these, written an order packing me off to jail? What is this power behind you?"

"I may live in hope, perhaps," he returned. "Your sword and your shrewdness may carry you far; and some day as far as the jail you speak of. I shan't fail to write that order when the time comes."

I left him with that.

As I quitted the house a man pressed close to me, and I turned to see what he wanted. There was no one else about.

"Is it done?" he whispered.

I looked at him keenly; but I had never seen him before, I thought.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"The night in the riverside wharf," he whispered back.

He was a Nihilist; here right in the very eye of the police web.

"The way is laid," I answered equivocally, as I hurried away.

I had actually forgotten in my eagerness all about my charge to kill the man with whom I had been closeted in conference.

But I saw instantly that the Nihilists would probably hold it for an act of treachery that I had been in Tueski's house and yet had let him live.

CHAPTER XIII.—OLGA IN A NEW LIGHT.

I WALKED back to my rooms as I wished to cool my head and think. The interview with Christian Tueski had excited me and, what was of more importance, had kindled a hope that after all I might be able to escape the tremendous difficulties that encompassed me.

One thing in particular pleased me, for it was a double edged knife loosening two sets of the complications. It was the promise I had given to the man to respect his wife so long as he kept faith with me. This gave me power over him, and what was of infinitely greater value to me personally, it was a shrewd defense against the wife also.

I smiled as I thought of the ingenuity of this. But I little anticipated what would really be the result. It seemed then the shrewdest and cleverest, as well as the most daring thing I had done; but in the end the consequences were such as might properly have followed an act of the grossest stupidity and villainy possible. But for the moment it pleased me; and I was in truth finding the keenest pleasure in this parrying of the thrusts which the fates were making at me.

There was a problem I could not solve, however, in the question of the power which seemed to be behind the chief of police; the power which made him apparently afraid to strike me openly, though so willing to trip me secretly. I could not imagine what it could be, nor whence it could come.

When I reached my rooms my sister and Paula Tueski were waiting for me in the greatest anxiety; and both were overjoyed to see me safe and apparently in high spirits. The police agents had been for the fellow I had left under lock and key, and Olga had taken care to carry out my instructions to the letter. Her quick instincts had warned her, and she had made a parade of almost affectionate friendship for the other woman during the time the men had been present.

After I arrived she could scarcely take her eyes off me, and I saw them glistening as with tears.

"I will take you home directly," I said carelessly, as a brother might speak. "But I have something to say first to Madame Tueski; so you must wait for a few minutes."

A look of reproach nearly found expression in hasty words; but, remembering herself, she said hastily, acting the part to the life:

"Oh, you're always so mysterious, Alexis. I've no patience with you."

Then I led the other into my second sitting room and told her much of

what had passed; and when I came to that part of the interview that immediately concerned herself, she was very bitter and angry.

"You think I am a pawn to be moved where you like in your game: of no account and the meanest thing on the board. You and he are both alike in that—but wait. Your life is mine, Alexis. I have told you."

"But you must surely see that the first consideration must be all our lives—to say nothing of our safety," I answered rather roughly, I fear, and very unsympathetically. Her heroics rasped me. "What good is your living going to do me if your husband shuts me up in a dungeon, or sends me dancing to Siberia, or causes a dagger to let out my life blood?"

"You mean to keep the word you gave him?"

"Certainly, so long as he keeps his."

She fixed her large, lustrous eyes on me, and let them rest on me during a long silence.

"You and he together will drive me to some desperate deed," she said at length, very slowly. "Then perhaps you will learn what a love like mine will dare for your sake. I cannot and will not bear this separation."

She wearied me with these protests, but I said nothing, and went on to question her as to whether there was any power behind her husband influencing him in regard to me. She knew nothing, but admitted that she had her suspicions.

I next told her that while he was trying to assassinate me, she might find the tables turned on him, as there was a Nihilist plot on foot to murder him. She paid little heed to it at first, saying that there had been many such schemes formed, all of which had proved abortive, because he was most carefully and continuously guarded. A moment later, however, her manner changed a little, and she questioned me somewhat closely concerning the matter.

"They don't choose their agents shrewdly in these things," she said, "and we hear too soon of their designs. They should choose a man like you, Alexis." She seemed to speak with a hidden meaning, and I was doubtful whether she knew anything; but I kept my doubts to myself.

"If they had done that, I had a rare chance tonight," I answered.

"A bold man or a reckless woman makes the chance," she retorted in the same manner. "I am going, Alexis," she added, and then forced on me caresses which were vastly repulsive. But I could not reveal my true feelings until I had at any rate placed Olga in safety. My indifference and coldness were apparent to the woman, and she upbraided me with a burst of angry passion till I had to patch up a sort of peace.

We went back to Olga and soon afterwards drove away, Olga and I setting the other down at her door.

So long as Madame Tueski was with us, Olga maintained the part of the impatient sister; but as soon as we were alone her manner changed altogether.

"I had to send for you this evening," I said, "and you saved me from a situation of great difficulty and hazard by coming so promptly. I thank you for having done so."

No reply. I glanced at her in the gloomy light in the cab and saw the profile set hard and immobile, with the lips pressed closely together.

"Storm signals out," thought I.

"I was saying I thanked you. You acted with rare discretion and did me a great service."

Not a word.

"You were not so silent just now," I hazarded.

"I was acting—with discretion." She repeated my word with that relish and enjoyment which a well regulated mind always feels about a telling sarcasm.

"And what sort of discretion is this?" I retorted, laughing.

She was silent again.

"I have a good deal to tell you in explanation."

"I have no wish to hear anything, thank you," she interposed. "I can trust your discretion"—much emphasis again on the word—"as completely as you can mine. I am glad to have been of *use* to you and Madame Tueski." She threw the word "*use*" at me as if it had been a bomb to be exploded in my face.

"What have I done that's wrong? I'm very sorry," I said.

"I beg you not to apologize. You never used to, and as you appear to be slipping back into your old habits, it would be out of character to apologize—to me. I am only to be used."

"I don't understand you."

There was a moment's silence, and then she could contain her indignation no longer and burst out with the cause of it.

"Why didn't you send me home immediately you returned? You could surely have given me your servant as an escort. Then you would have spared me the shame and humiliation waiting during your private interchange of confidences with that woman."

At that instant we stopped at her house.

"Please do not come in tonight," she said. "I have had to keep certain things waiting here while I was being of *use* to you, and was sitting alone in your rooms; and I have now very much to do."

"I am sorry to trouble you, but I am coming in. This thing must be cleared up at once;" and I followed my very angry sister into the house.

She led the way to a small drawing room, and turning to me said coldly:

"I am ready to hear what you wish to say."

I had been thinking quickly during the interval, and now changed my point of attack.

"I have a very serious thing to say. You gave me your promise——"

"I would rather you would not remind me of any promises," she interrupted. This was said deliberately, but then she broke through her cold formality, and with a little stamp of her foot finished angrily: "I won't keep them. I won't be reminded of them. Things are altered—altogether altered."

"What I was going to say is——" I began, when she broke in again.

"I won't hear it. I don't want to hear any more. I wish you'd go."

"You must hear me," I said quietly, but with some authority in my tone.

"Must! I don't understand you."

"Must—for your own safety."

"Thank you. I can protect myself. Your other cares and responsibilities have a prior claim on you. Will you please leave me now?"

"No, I can't go until I've told you——"

"I will not listen! Didn't I tell you?" She was vehemence itself.

I shrugged my shoulders in despair.

"This morning——" I began; but the moment I opened my lips she broke out again with her vehement interruptions.

"Ah, things were different this morning. I had not then been insulted. Do you forget I am a Russian; and think you can treat me as you will—keep me waiting while—bah, it is unbearable. Will you go away? Is there no sense of manliness in you that will make you leave me? Must I call for assistance? I will do that if you do not leave me. You can write what you have to say. But please spare me the pain of seeing you again."

Her words cut me to the quick, but then roused me also.

"You had better call for assistance," I answered firmly. Then I crossed to the door, locked it, and put the key in my pocket. "I will spare you the pain of another interview, but now that I am here, I decline to go until I have explained."

"You cannot explain," she burst in. The word seemed to madden her.

"Cannot explain what?"

"That woman's kisses!"

The words appeared to leap from her lips involuntarily, and she repented them as soon as uttered; and drawing herself up she tried to appear cold and stolid. But this attempt failed completely; and in her anger at the thought behind the words, and with herself for having given it utterance, she stood looking at me, her bosom heaving and tossing with agitation, and her face and eyes aglow with an emotion which, with a strange delight, I saw was jealousy.

There came a long pause, during which I recalled her manner and the way she had played with my words while on one of our rides when we had spoken of Devinsky's proposal to make her his wife.

I have always been slow to read women's hearts, and have generally read them wrong; but I began to study this one with a sense of new and peculiar pleasure. She was growing very dear to me for a sister.

If my guess was right, my conduct with that infernal woman, Paula Tueski, must have been gall and wormwood to Olga.

How should I have relished it had the positions been reversed, and Devinsky been in Paula Tueski's place?

These thoughts which flashed across me in rapid succession produced a peculiar frame of mind. I had stood a minute in silence not looking at her, and when I raised my eyes again to her I was conscious of sensations toward her that were altogether different from anything I had felt before. She had become more beautiful than ever in my eyes; I, more eagerly anxious to please and appease; while at bottom there was a dominant fear that I might

be mistaken in my new reading of her actions, in which was mixed up another fear, not nearly so strong, that her anger on account of Paula Tueski might really end in our being separated.

My first act showed the change in me. I ceased to feel the freedom with which I had hitherto acted the part of brother, and I immediately threw open the door and stood aside, that she might go out if she wished. Then I said :

"Perhaps you are right. My conduct may be inexcusable, even to save your life."

Whether there was anything in my manner that touched her—I was conscious of speaking with much less confidence than usual—or whether it was the act of unfastening the door ; or whether, again, some subtle influence had set her thoughts moving in parallel columns to mine, I do not know. But her own manner changed quite as suddenly as mine ; and when she caught my eyes on her she flushed and paled with effects that made her radiantly beautiful to me.

She said not a word, and finding this, I continued :

"I am sorry a cloud has come between us at the last, and through something that was not less hateful to me because forced by the needs of the case. We have been such friends, but——" here I handed her the permit—"you must use this at once."

She took it and read it slowly in silence, and then asked :

"How did you get this ?"

"Myself, personally, from the chief of police."

"Why did you run the mad risk of going to him yourself ?"

"There was no risk—not so much in going to him as in keeping away from him. He had tried to have me murdered, and I went to find out the reason."

"I told you I would not leave Moscow."

"Unless—and the condition now applies—it was necessary for my safety."

"And you ?" The light of fear was in her eyes as she asked this.

"As soon as you are across the frontier I shall make a dash for my liberty also. I can't go before, because my absence would certainly bring you under suspicion."

She now looked at me again very intently, her head bent slightly forward and her lips parted with the strain of a new thought, while suspicion of my motive chased the fear for my safety from her face.

"Is this to get me out of the way ? I won't go !"

All my honor for myself and my love for her were in that note of reproach, and they appeared to waken an echo ; for then this most strange girl threw herself down on a couch, and burying her face in her hands, sobbed passionately.

I turned away from the sight of her emotion—the more painful because of the strong self reserve and force she had always shown—and paced up and down the room. I forced back my own feelings and the desire to tell her what those feelings were. To do that would be worse than madness. Till we were out of Russia we were brother and sister, and the bar between us was heavier than we could hope to move.

When the storm of her sobs ceased she remained for some minutes quite still; and I would not break the silence, knowing she was fighting her way back to self possession.

Presently she got up and came to me, holding out her hand.

"I will go, Alexis—we are still firm friends?" This with a little smile of wistful interrogation. "Can you forgive my temper? I was mad for the moment, I think. But I trust you. I do indeed, absolutely. I know you had no thought of insulting me. I know that. I couldn't think so meanly of you. It's hard to leave—Russia; and—and everything. And you, too—at this time. Must I really go?" A half beseeching glance into my eyes and a pause for the answer I could not give. "Very well. I know what your silence means. Come, tomorrow morning—and say——" she stooped again and bit her trembling lips to steady them as she framed the word—"and say—good by to me. And now, please, let me go—brother and truest friend."

She wrung my hand, and then before I could prevent her, or even guess her intention, she pressed her lips to it and, with the tears again in her eyes, she went quickly away, leaving me to stare after her like a helpless fool, longing to call her back and tell her everything, and yet afraid.

CHAPTER XIV.—THE DEED WHICH RANG THROUGH RUSSIA.

It was not destined that Olga should leave Russia yet. A terrible event happened within the next few hours, the report of which ran through Russia like a clap of thunder, convulsing the whole nation, and shaking for the moment the entire social fabric to its lowest foundations. And one of its smaller consequences was to ruin my plans and expose me to infinite personal peril.

Olga was to start at noon, and I proposed to see her an hour before that time for what I knew would be a very trying ordeal. But when that hour came I was in the midst of a very different kind of interview.

Outside official circles I was one of the first men to learn the news. Just before ten o'clock a messenger came with a request for me to go at once to the police bureau. I started in the full conviction that for some cause Tueski had changed his mind and meant to arrest me. I was of course helpless; and could do no more than scribble a hasty line to Olga telling her of my appointment, asking her not to wait for me, and bidding her good by. But I did not send it. The police agent said with great politeness he would prefer my not doing anything then; I could send the note equally well from the bureau. I knew what that meant and yielded.

The moment I arrived at the office I could see that some event of altogether unusual importance and gravity had occurred. The air was laden with the suggestion of excitement. There was an absence of that orderly, business-like routine always characteristic of Russian public offices. The police agents were present in exceptionally large numbers, hurrying through the corridors, thronging the rooms, and standing in groups engaged in animated discussion.

I was kept waiting some time, perhaps half an hour, before a word was

spoken to me by any one in authority; and then I was ushered into the presence of a man I did not know.

"I am sorry to trouble you, Lieutenant Petrovitch, but there are one or two questions you can answer; and I need not say that as a Russian officer, bearing the emperor's commission, we shall look to you to reply very fully."

I bowed. It was a fit preface to a conversation which should end as such things generally did. But at any rate I should learn what they intended to do with me. Before he spoke again I asked that the letter I had written to Olga might be sent; but he put the question aside, with a curt reply that it could wait until the emperor's business was finished; and again I bowed in acquiescence. I could do nothing.

"Please to tell me exactly what passed between you and M. Tueski yesterday," he said. "And particularly how you obtained the permits for yourself and sister. I invite you to be particularly frank."

The question startled me. I couldn't understand it.

"Your question surprises me," I replied, to gain a little time to think. "M. Tueski himself knows and can surely tell you everything."

"I ask my questions in the name of the emperor, sir," returned my examiner sternly.

"M. Tueski had done me the honor of trying to have me murdered, and I went to see him to demand the reason. He did not deny it. I persuaded him in the end to abandon his private malice and prevailed upon him to give me the permits for myself and my sister to leave Russia for a while. When he had given them to me I left him."

"Where are they?"

"Here is one. The other is with my sister, who leaves Moscow at mid-day."

"You may stop her attempting to leave. It will be useless. What else passed?" And he then plunged into the closest cross examination of me, the real object of which I could not guess, unless it meant that Tueski had in some way got into a mess for letting me have the permits. I answered all the questions as fully as possible, taking care only to avoid mentioning Paula Tueski's name in connection with the compact with her husband.

To my surprise I seemed to satisfy the man for the time. When he had about turned me inside out, he sat for some minutes looking over my answers and comparing them with some of his notes; after which he remained thinking closely.

"What did you do after leaving M. Tueski?"

"I went straight to my rooms and my sister; together we drove Madame Tueski to her house; I then went home with my sister, remained there about an hour, or perhaps less, and went home and to bed."

"You have told me all you know, lieutenant?"

"You can ask M. Tueski," I returned.

He fixed his eyes steadily on me while I could have counted twenty, and then said slowly and with deep emphasis:

"M. Tueski is dead."

"Dead!" I repeated in the profoundest surprise.

"Murdered. Found this morning in the lower part of his own house with a dagger thrust through his heart."

"Murdered!" I could scarcely believe my ears.

"Yes. 'For freedom's sake,'" said the man, with a curl of the lip. "At least, so a message on the dagger said. Now you can understand the significance of my questions."

I understood it all well enough; far better than the man himself even imagined; and I was completely beaten as to what the inner meaning of this most terrible event could be.

One of my first reflections was that if any of the suspicions of my Nihilism which the dead man entertained were chronicled anywhere, my arrest and that of Olga would certainly follow; and we should both be doomed.

"I can scarcely realize it," I said. "It is horrible."

"So these wretches will find," returned my interlocutor. "These carion. But now, in view of this—and I have told you because of the candid manner in which you have answered my questions—is there anything you noticed in your visit yesterday to help us."

Clearly he did not suspect me; and no records had been found yet.

"No. The place seemed alive with inmates—like a rabbit warren. Enough to have held it against a regiment. Great heaven, what villains!" I cried in horror. Mine was genuine feeling enough, for some of the terrible effects to myself were fast crowding on my thoughts. I recalled my encounter with my Nihilist comrade on the very threshold of the house.

"Of course, those permits will be withdrawn now, lieutenant," said the official as he dismissed me. But his manner was much less severe and curt than at the outset. "As a matter of fact they ought never to have been granted, though I cannot explain why just now. But under the circumstances you will probably feel personally unwilling to leave Russia at such a juncture."

"I should feel myself a traitor," said I grandiloquently; and in fact I did feel very much like one as I left him, rejoicing that I still breathed the fresh air of heaven instead of the fetid atmosphere of a jail.

One thing was certain now—neither Olga nor I could hope to escape yet. Any attempt would be fatal. The murder of such a man would mean that the lurid searchlight of suspicion would fall in all directions, on the guilty and guiltless alike. The liberty certainly, and probably the life of every suspected Nihilist in Moscow were at stake; and the slightest trip or false step on our part would amount to direct invitation to ruin.

As I walked back sadly and thoughtfully to my rooms, I had abundant proofs of the terrible effects of the assassination. The police agents were everywhere, watching, raiding, arresting; and in my short walk I met more than one gloomy party of them, each with its one or two prisoners, hurrying on foot or in hired carriages to the police stations.

It is not my business, however, to describe here the scenes that followed the most daring, most secret, most thrilling, and, save one, most terrible assassination that ever convulsed Russia. The murder of the Czar stirred the surface of the world more, because it had more of the pageantry of crime

about it ; but the death of the chief of the Moscow police caused a much deeper sense of insecurity and spread a far greater dread of the secret power of Nihilism.

Who had done it? To me it was an inscrutable mystery ; unless it had been the man I had seen near the house. But what I had to consider was not whose hand had driven the dragger home, but rather what the effects would be to me and to her for whose safety I now felt more fear and concern than I had felt for myself in all my life.

One incident in the interview I had just had impressed me greatly : the reference which the official had dropped as to the power behind Tueski in dealing with me. My questioner had seemed to know about it that morning ; and all this perplexed me.

As soon as I reached my rooms I had to hurry off to the barracks in response to an urgent summons ; and I joined readily in the excited conversation of my comrades about this latest Nihilist stroke. The news was only beginning to leak out, and it assumed the wildest shapes ; nor did I feel at liberty to reduce the rumors to facts.

Before the morning's work was over orders came that the troops were to be paraded for duty in the streets ; and we were told off for patrol work in different parts of the city to protect the railway stations and other public buildings. All that day we were kept on duty ; and as other troops kept pouring in from other centers the whole place seemed under arms like a beleaguered town.

All day and all night the raids and surprise visits by the police were in progress, and hundreds, if not thousands, of men and women must have been arrested, until the jails were crowded to suffocation point, and every spot where prisoners could be packed was crammed and choked with suspects.

We were not relieved until late at night, having been all day without food ; and even then we were kept in the barracks in readiness for any disturbance.

The next day's program was much the same ; and I fretted at not being able to either see or send to Olga. Knowing of her brother's Nihilism she would surely think I had been arrested ; while I on my side was afraid for her.

In the afternoon of the third day we got leave from duty and from barracks for a few hours, and I went straight off to Olga. Meanwhile not a hint had been obtained as to the identity of the assassin.

I found Olga white and wan and ill on my account ; and when we met I was, on my side, almost too moved for speech. At first I could do no more than glance into her eyes as we clasped each the other's hand.

"You are looking frightfully ill, Olga," I said at length.

She returned my look without speech and then her brow contracted, she breathed deeply as if in pain, and turning away wrung her hands with a gesture of despair.

"What is the matter? What has happened to you? There must be something——" I stopped, or rather the sight of the white face all drawn and quivering with pain stopped me.

"Oh, it is too horrible, too awful. God have mercy on us. God have mercy on us."

Sad as things were so far as I knew them, this dejection seemed disproportionate and excessive. She was like a mad woman distraught with fear or grief; and she waved her arms and hands about as if wrestling with emotions she could not conquer.

"Oh, it can't be true; it can't be," she moaned; and then came suddenly and clinging to me, turned my face to the light and holding it between her white, trembling hands, she gazed at me with a look of mingled anguish, fear, doubt, wildness, and—love; her lips parted and her bosom rising and falling as if in the strain of her passionate feelings.

When her scrutiny was over, her hands seemed to slip from me and she fell on her knees close to me and I heard her muttering prayers with vehement fervor.

"What does this mean, Olga?" I asked gently, bending down and laying my hand on her shoulder. She looked round and up at my touch, and tried to smile. Then she rose, and standing opposite to me, put her hands on my two shoulders so that her face was close beneath mine. And all the time she was muttering prayers. Then, in a voice broken and tremulous, she said:

"Brother, swear as you believe there is a God in heaven you will answer truly what I ask."

"I will. I swear it," I answered, wishing to quiet her.

"Did you really do this?"

"Do what?" I asked, not understanding.

"Kill Christian Tueski?"

"Did I kill him? No, child, certainly not." I spoke in the greatest astonishment.

"Oaths may bind you to secrecy, I know. But, for God's sake, tell me the truth—the truth. You can tell me. I am——" I felt her shudder.

"Is it this which has been driving you distracted? There is no cause. I know no more by whose hand that man came by his death than a babe unborn."

"Say that again, Alexis. Say it again. It is the sweetest music I have heard in all my life."

I repeated the assurance, and a smile broke out over her face. Next she cried and laughed and cried again, and then sat down as if completely overcome by the rush of relief from a too heavy strain.

"What does all this mean?" I asked quietly, after a while. "Try and tell me."

"I have been like a mad thing for two days. Let me wait a while. I will tell you presently. Oh, thank God, thank God for what you have said. It drove me mad to think you should have been driven to this by me; and that perhaps for my sake you might have been urged to do such a horrible thing. Waking and sleeping alike I have thought of nothing but of your suffering torture and death. And all through me—through me." She covered her face in horror at the remembrance of her thoughts; but a moment later took away her hands to smile at me.

"You have not told me yet what made you think anything of the sort."

"I will tell you. As soon as I heard the news I knew of course that, as I had been mixed up in some old Nihilist troubles, it would be hopeless for me to think of leaving Moscow; and when the police agent came I let him understand that I had given up all thought of going. Then I was all anxiety for news of you, and in the afternoon I went to your rooms. I found them shut and could hear nothing. Then I began to fear for you. I am only a woman."

She stopped and smiled to me before resuming. Then with a shudder she continued:

"Then a most strange thing happened. Borlas came to me just at dusk; and he looked so strange that at first I thought he had been drinking. Saying he had a message from you, he waited until I had sent the servant away.

"What is it?" I asked.

"For answer he gave me a sign that made my heart sink. I knew it too well, and I looked at him with the keenest scrutiny. Had the Nihilists put a spy on you even in your own servant? Then I saw—that it was not Borlas, but a man so cleverly made up to resemble him that I had been at first deceived.

"What do you want here?" I asked, now with every nerve in my body at full tension.

"Do you know?" and the light in his eyes seemed to flash into mine.

"Do I know what?" I could see there was something behind all this.

"He bent close to me, though we were of course alone, and spoke his reply in a fierce whisper.

"Tell your brother that after this proof our hearts beat but for him; our plans shall all wait on him; every man of us will go to his death silently and cheerfully at his mere bidding. He leads, we follow. He has nobly kept his pledge for the cause of God and freedom."

"As I heard this my heart seemed to stop in pain. I had to hold the table to save myself from falling.

"Do you mean," I gasped, "that Alexis has murdered——"

"Silence, sister," replied the man sternly. "That is no word for you to utter or for me to hear. Your brother is as true a friend as Russian liberty ever had; and I thank my God that I have ever been allowed to even touch the hand that has dealt this vigorous blow and done this noble and righteous act."

"I will tell him," I said.

"Tell him also he need have no fear. Not a man who was at the meeting is in the city now save me; and not a single soul of the thousands these dogs of tyranny can seize knows anything—save only me. And I would to heaven they would take me and torture me that I might use my last breath and my latest effort to taunt them that I know the hero who has done it and die with my knowledge a secret."

"Then this terrible man, you may not know his name, but I know him, left me telling me it was 'a glorious day for Russia, and that God would

smile forever upon you for this deed.' And I was plunged into a maelstrom of agonizing fears, racking doubts, and poisoned thoughts about you and what I had led you to do."

What Olga said had immense importance and significance for me. It showed me a startling view of my situation. It was clear the Nihilists attributed the murder to me, and what effect that would have upon us I was at a loss even to conjecture.

"The man's blood is not on my hands, Olga; but I cannot be surprised at the mistake. I will tell you everything;" and I related to her then all that had passed.

"Who can have done it, then?" she asked, when I finished.

"It is as complete a mystery to me as to the police. The man I saw near the house might have done it; but then I suppose it must have been the same man who came to you; and in that case he certainly wouldn't have set it down to me. I am beaten. But I am likely to find the wrongful inheritance embarrassing. I must be more cautious than ever to draw down no word of suspicion upon either of us. We must both be scrupulously careful. And thus it will be impossible for you to think of getting away."

"It's a leaden sky that has no silver streak," replied Olga. "And that impossibility is my streak."

I could not but understand this, and even while my judgment condemned her, my heart was warmed by her words. But my judgment spoke.

"If you were away, my anxieties would be all but ended."

"If I were away my anxieties would be all but unendurable," she retorted, following my words and smiling. It was not possible to hear this with anything except delight; but I had my feelings too well under control now to let them be seen easily.

"That may be," I said. "But my first and chief effort will be to get you safe across the frontier."

She made no answer, but her manner told me she would not consent to go until it had become a rank impossibility for her to stay. Presently she said, with much feeling:

"If I had been away and the news had come that you had done the thing these men assert, how do you think I could have borne it? I should have either come rushing back here or have died of remorse and fear and anxiety on your account. It was through me you commenced all this."

"But of my own choice that I continued," I replied. "And believe me, if all were to come over again I should act in just the same way. I have never had such a glorious time before; all I want now is to see you safe."

Olga paused to look at me steadily.

"You've never told me the whole reason why you were so ready to take all these desperate risks. Will you tell me now?"

"I had made a mess of things generally, as I told you before," I answered, with a smile and a slight flush at the reminiscence thus disturbed by her question.

"Was there a woman in it?" Her eyes were fixed on me as she put the question.

"There's a woman in most things," I answered equivocally.

"Yes, I suppose so." She turned away and looked down, and asked :

"Were you very fond of her, Alexis?"

"Judging by the little ripple that remains on the surface, now that she's gone out of my life, no ; judging by the splash the stone made at first, yes. But she's gone."

"Yet the waters of the pool may be left permanently clouded. I am sorry for you, Alexis ; and if you were really my brother, I would try and help you two to mend the breach."

"That's not altogether a very proper thing to say." I spoke lightly, and she looked up to question me. "Her husband might not thank you, I mean ; though I'm not quite sure about that ;" and then having told her so much, I told her the story of my last meeting with Sir Philip Cargill and Edith. But she did not take it as I wished.

"You must have loved her if you meant to kill her," she said.

"And ceased then, if I left her to live a miserable life."

"I should like to see the woman you have ceased to love," she said, womanlike in curiosity—and something else.

"You may do that yet, if only Alexis Petrovitch can make a safe way for his sister out of Russia ;" and then I added, pausing and looking at her with a meaning in my eyes which I wished her to understand, though I dared not put it in plain words : "But we shall not be brother and sister then."

She glanced up hurriedly, her face aglow with a sudden rush of thought—pleasurable thought, too—and then looked down again and smiled.

"In that case how should we two be together?" she asked.

"Do you mean that such a time as that will be likely to render us ready to part?"

To that her only answer was another glance and a deeper blush. Then I made an effort and recovered myself on the very verge.

"But while we are here, we are brother and sister, Olga ;" and feeling that if I wished to keep other things unsaid, I had better go away, I left her.

CHAPTER XV.—THE KEY TO THE MYSTERY.

THE more I contemplated the position the less I liked it, and the more urgent appeared the reasons for hurrying Olga out of the country.

All my care was for her. Before this new feeling of mine for her had forced itself upon me, the situation had been really a game of wits, with my life as the stake ; but now Olga's life, or at least her liberty, were also at stake. It was there the crisis pinched me till I winced and writhed under it. Fear had got hold of me at last, and I tugged restlessly at the chain.

That night and the next day, the day of Christian Tueski's funeral, were occupied with heavy duties, because the authorities, both military and civil, persisted in believing there was danger of an emeute. I could have counseled them differently if I had dared to open my lips. At least I thought I could ; although I did not then hold the key to the mystery. I got it from Paula Tueski.

In the afternoon of the day but one after the funeral I had a brief note asking me to call on her. I went and found her surrounded by all the signs and trappings of the deepest mourning. She received me very gravely, and while there was any one in the room she played the part of the sorrowing, disconsolate widow; but the instant we were alone she showed a most indecent and revolting haste to let me know her mind.

"We are alone now, Alexis," she said.

"I have called as you asked and because I wished to express my sympathy——"

"Psh! Don't let us be hypocrites, you and I," she exclaimed, half angrily, and with great energy. "I do not pretend to you that I am sorry to be free, and don't you pretend to me either."

I didn't answer, and my silence irritated her.

"Would you have me weep, tear my hair, put ashes on my head and grovel in the dust because the biggest villain and coward that ever lived in human shape is dead? I hated him living; shall I love him dead?"

"At least the dead are dead, and to revile them is mere empty brutality," said I, somewhat harshly.

"Then I like empty brutality if it relieves my feelings. I have been a hypocrite long enough. I should hate myself if I did not speak the truth to you."

I shrugged my shoulders. I had no answer.

"Why didn't you send a wreath of pure white flowers as an emblem of your regard? Why not a message to swell the millions of lies that men have uttered in their squalid fear of offending the government by silence? Ugh! It makes me sick when I think of it all;" and she shuddered as if in disgust. "He was a fiend, and I won't call him by any softer name merely because his power to harm is gone. Didn't he try to murder you? And wasn't it jealousy? Ah, we have much to be thankful to the Nihilists for, you and I." There was an indescribable suggestion of a hidden meaning about this.

I hated the woman.

"You have no clue yet, I suppose?"

"Yes, I have a clue," she replied, with a laugh that sounded like a threat. "I can put my hand on the murderer when I will—and I will, if he proves a traitor."

"You are in a dramatic mood," I answered. "Who is the man? Why not denounce him? Surely this act is what you must call treachery."

"There was a Nihilist plot to kill the man," she said, speaking with contemptuous flippancy of the dead.

"Yes, I told you that myself," I replied.

"It was because of that he died."

"So everybody thinks."

"And how do you account for it?" she asked, looking at me keenly.

"I have no more idea than yourself."

She laughed, and a hard, forced laugh it was. Then she got up from her chair and walked twice up and down the room in dead silence. She stopped in front of me and stared down into my eyes.

"Alexis, do you really love me?"

The question was an exceedingly unpleasant one and filled me with disgust.

"Surely this is no time for us to speak of such things," I said.

"Do you love me, Alexis?" she repeated.

"I will not answer now," I said, rising.

"Why not? Why should we not speak of love now—now, aye and always? Or is your passion so poor and sickly a thing that a puff from the wind of propriety kills it? Not speak of such things! I would plight my love to you across the very body of the dead man!" She spoke with passionate vehemence. "Remember what I told you—your life is mine. You cannot escape me. Now, tell me, do you love me?"

"I have given my answer, and if you ask that question again today I will not stop in the room," I said angrily; the woman's persistency increased my disgust.

She laughed—a half hysterical laugh of anger.

"So you will not stop in the room and will never I suppose return. Be careful," she cried, with one of her quick, passionate changes, "or I will send you away and never let you come back except begging for mercy on your knees for yourself and your sister." She turned away and stood by the window; and I could see by her movements that she was struggling with violent emotions.

She came back at length, the face paler and the voice not so steady.

"I will ask you if you love me," she said. "And I dare you to go away from the room."

I accepted the challenge without an instant's hesitation.

"I am going. I will see you when you are cooler;" and I went to the door.

With a quick rush she prevented my opening it, and putting her back to it stared at me in the most violent passion, which thickened her voice as she spoke.

"You shall go directly—if you wish to. You will make me hate you, one day, Alexis, and then—I will kill you."

"It will be far better for me to come some other time," I said, anxious to leave.

"You will have plenty of opportunities, never fear," she retorted, with a very angry, sneering laugh. "And what is more, you will not dare not to use them. Listen—it is love for you drives me to this—a love that you can never escape now, Alexis, even if you had the will."

She paused, but I said nothing. I had nothing to say. All I wished was to get away.

"Do you think there is anything I would not do for your love, Alexis? I have told you there is nothing—told you so scores of times. Now I have proved it. Do you hear?—proved it. I proved it a few nights ago, when this hand plunged the dagger into my husband's heart—for your sake."

I started back and looked at the woman in horror.

"Yes, this hand"—she held it out—"so white, smooth, deft, and

shapely. Don't start from it. There is no blood showing on it now, and never was. I know how to thrust a dagger home too cleverly to leave a trace of either blood or guilt on me. In all this Moscow of ours the one person who is deemed above all others guiltless—is myself. Had it been in reality the Nihilist deadly secret stroke that men deem it, it could not have been more cunningly contrived, more secretly planned, more fatally executed. Yet the motive was not hate of a government, but love for a man. For you, Alexis; you and you only. Now do you wish to go?"

She moved away from the door, but I made no attempt to move. The horror of her story had fascinated me.

"There was a tinge of hate in it, too, mark you, and more than a tinge. But I'll tell you all. You ought to know, since you were in reality the cause of all. You gave me the motive, suggested the occasion, and provoked that which led to it. More than that, too, you can by a single word from me be made to bear the brunt. Now, will you go?"

Was the woman mad that she spoke in this way? If so, there was a devilish method in her madness as the story she told quickly showed me.

"I knew the day would come when either I should kill him or he would kill me; for he was a devil. Well, you roused all that was most evil, vicious, and fiendish in him in that interview, and when I saw him he was like a man bereft of his wits. Every form of reproach he could heap on me in cold, contemptuous, galling sneers he uttered with all the calculated aggravation that could make a taunt unbearable. He threatened me in every tone of menace, and when I answered, turned suddenly furious and struck me violent blows and vowed to kill me. It was then I recalled your words, that there was a Nihilist plot against his life; and I vowed I would be the means of carrying it out; for I knew I could easily put suspicion away from me. I lured him cunningly to that part of the house where he was found, plunged the dagger into his breast, put into his pocket the forged warning of a Nihilist attack, opened the house at a point where a man could have entered, fastened to the dagger the Nihilist watchword, and then crept away to my own rooms."

"It was a fiendish plot," I exclaimed hotly.

"It was inspired by love for you, Alexis. It was truly 'For freedom's sake'—freedom, that should unite us forever."

"Do you think I could ever be anything to a woman whose hand is red with murder?" I cried, in indignant horror.

"It was done for you—for love of you, Alexis."

"Love has no kin with murder," I exclaimed bitterly.

"Your life is mine, remember," she answered firmly. Her determination and strength were inexhaustible. "This makes you ten thousand times more surely mine than ever. I told you you were the cause—and also, that you could be made to bear the brunt. Listen. You know well enough what chance a Nihilist has on whom the fangs of suspicion have fastened. You are a Nihilist. Your sister is one also. I know this. Well, what think you would that Nihilist have of his life whose dagger it was that found its way between my husband's ribs. What then, if I had found the sheath of it and secreted it to save the man? Suppose, too, that I had kept back the dis-

covery because of my love for him? And further that he was leaving the house when my husband, roused by the noise I made, met him; and that I saw the deed done?" She paused and changed her tone to one of fierce directness, as she continued: "The dagger that killed Christian Tueski is your own weapon, known by its sheath to a hundred people; and that sheath, with your name on it, is in my possession. What chance of life would there be for you and yours if these things were made known. Now, do you wish to go?"

A hot and passionate reply rose to my lips, but was checked before uttered. I thought of Olga, and I knew that every word this woman said was true—that no power in Russia could save my life or Olga's liberty if the tale were told now.

Delay I must have at any cost. Time in which to meet this woman's horrible cunning and daring plot. If I had hated her before, she was now loathsome; while the fears she had stirred on Olga's account intensified and embittered a thousandfold my resentment. Yet hateful as the task was, I was prepared to continue my part with her.

"You think this love?" I said, after a pause in which she had been waiting breathlessly for me to speak. "Do women love the men they hold to them by the tether rope of threats?"

"Do women kill for the sake of men they do not love?"

"Do you think to keep my love by threatening me with death?"

"Have I not inflicted death to keep you? Why do you wish to bandy phrases? My deeds speak for themselves. They show you well enough what I will dare to keep you true to me. You are mine, Alexis, and no power shall ever part us. I have told you this often before. It was you who sought me, who proffered me your love. Do you think me a silly, simple fool to be wooed and won and when deserted, willing to do no more than wring my feeble hands and shed silly tears, and prate and maunder between my stupid sobs, that my heart is broken and that I fain would die? Bah! I am not of that sort. I am a woman who can will and act, and fashion my own ends in my own way. It is not the stream that carries me, but I who turn the stream even though it be mingled with blood. No, no. If you play me false, Alexis, it is you and not I who shall die because my heart is broken."

She showed this determination in every line of her beautiful face and movement of her magnificent figure, as she stood before me a lovely, hateful type of a vengeful woman. She changed her mood, however, with astonishing suddenness and turned all softness and tenderness.

"But under all this lies my love," she said. "It was love drove me to everything. Your pledge to that made me feel as nothing else could have done the wall of separation between us while he lived; and my love could not endure it. Ah, how I love you!"

While she was speaking, I was thinking; trying to see some flaw in the coil she had spread round me. But I could see none. Time might find a way; but even time she grudged, and did not mean to give.

"But we can't be married now at the moment when your husband is

scarcely lying cold in his grave," I said, aghast at her cold blooded proposition. "Every man and woman in Moscow would immediately think we had murdered him together in order to marry."

"Every man and woman will not know," she answered calmly. "Do you think there is no such thing possible in this holy Russia of ours, or that gold cannot buy silence here just as well as anywhere else in the world?"

"I know that a secret marriage under these circumstances would put the lives of us both into the keeping of any one who knew of it, however well you paid him. The more you paid, indeed, the more certain the inference."

"I care nothing for that; nor will you if you love me as you have often sworn you do." She uttered this with the energy and passion which always were shown when she was crossed. But in this I was naturally as resolute as she.

"I will not do it," I said very firmly. "Understand me. I will not do it. It has nothing to do with love in any way at all; but simply self protection. It would be sheer suicide, and that I can do much more simply in other ways. I refuse absolutely to put both our lives into the keeping of any man in Russia, however holy and however well bribed. When we are married, it must be openly in the light of day and before men's faces; and that most certainly cannot be until all this excitement about your husband's death has died down, and the marriage can take place without causing suspicion. That must be at least six months hence—and probably a year or even two years."

"I won't wait," she cried instantly and angrily. "You want to break with me. I am no fool."

"As you will. Then instead of marrying me you can denounce me and come and see me beheaded or strangled. If you threaten me much longer," I said bitterly, "you will make me prefer one of the latter fates."

She bent close to me, trying to read my thoughts.

"And meanwhile?" she asked.

"Are you such a mad woman that you would have us placard the walls of the city with our secrets? Haven't we all Russia to hoodwink? Do you suppose your police agents and secret agents are all fools, to see nothing, think nothing, infer nothing? It may be hard for us to be apart, but what else is possible? Even this visit is foolhardiness itself and may set a thousand tongues clacking. Heaven knows, if ever a pair of lovers had need of caution we have. Have you dared so much for our marriage only to toss it all away now just for the lack of a little self control? We must see very little of each other. That is the only possible course."

"I'll not consent," she cried again, vehemently, and then broke out into a fresh storm of protests and reproaches. But I held to my decision, confident that she would see she must give way.

We parted without coming to any definite understanding; and I was glad because it spared me the infliction of those outward signs of affection in which she delighted to indulge, and which now would have been more than ever repulsive.

But the knowledge of the increased peril and embarrassment overwhelmed me with a feeling of anxious doubt and most painful and galling impotence.

CHAPTER XVI.—THE NEXT NIHILIST PLOT.

It seemed to me when I thought over my interview with Paula Tueski, that the complications which surrounded me could not possibly be increased. It was of course hopeless to think of leaving Russia except by some stratagem or in disguise; and this would be all the more difficult because Olga must leave first, and her flight would undoubtedly turn attention on me.

A positively baffling set of conditions faced me whichever way I turned. If I stayed on, Paula Tueski would insist on the marriage, and the crisis would come that way. If I attempted to go, she herself would join with the police in following me, and the mere endeavor to fly would give just that color to her story which would make all the world ready to believe it.

Again, if I tried the remaining alternative of proclaiming my identity, I had so egregiously compromised myself that I could not hope to escape heavy punishment of some sort; while it would certainly implicate Olga and at the same time have no effect against the direct lies to which Paula Tueski was ready to swear.

Above all, a great change had come over me. I wished to live and keep my freedom. The old indifference and apathy were gone. My object now was to get both Olga and myself out of the country in safety; and thus I took diametrically opposite views of difficulties which a few days previously—before I had made the discovery of my love for Olga—would have caused me little more than a laugh of amused perplexity.

Baffling as the puzzle was, it became infinitely more involved and perilous a few days later. Two fresh complications came to kill every forlorn hope.

My Nihilist friends were responsible for the first.

The belief that I had struck down the chief of the secret police and had done it in a manner so mysterious and impenetrable that it staggered the most ingenious police spies and defied the efforts of the astutest detectives, surrounded me with a glamour of wholly undeserved and undesired reputation.

The first intimation of this had reached me through Olga and was followed by several others; and I received clear proof that I was now regarded as a sort of leader of the forlorn hopes of these wild and desperate men. A man who could alone and unaided achieve what I was believed to have achieved, was held capable of the greatest deeds. So they appeared to argue, and I was accordingly picked out next for a task of infinite danger and hazard in a plot of even more tremendous consequences than that of the recent murder.

It was nothing less than the assassination of the Czar.

It was resolved, by whom and in what center of the empire I never knew, to follow up the murder of Christian Tueski by the greater blow and to strike this with the utmost possible despatch; as a proof of the desperate courage and daring of the Nihilists.

I was chosen to play one of the chief parts. I had no option to refuse.

There was no choice given me. The task was committed to me, just as a command might have been given me by my military superior officer. When I attempted to decline, I was given to understand that refusal meant death.

I was thus placed in a position of cruel difficulty, and I pondered with close self searching what I ought to do. Looking back, I think I made a blunder in not disclosing all I knew to the authorities, leaving them to take what steps they pleased; but in forming my decision at the time I was swayed by a number of considerations most difficult to weigh.

One of my chief reasons for holding my tongue was that as the plot followed so soon after the Tueski murder—for the plans were all made within a week—the fact that I knew so much of Nihilist affairs at such a time, would bring both Olga and myself under suspicion of having been privy to the former one. In such a case everything I wished to win would be jeopardized. A single breath of suspicion would have been enough to sweep us both into a jail; and once there, no one could say when, if ever, we should come out; for the whole country was red hot against the Nihilists, and men of the highest rank and wealth were languishing in jail.

I was also much concerned as to my supposed past. I knew that the old Alexis was gravely compromised; but what he had actually done, I did not know. If any old offenses were raked up I should be certain to be called to account for them now, while Olga would inevitably suffer with me.

For those reasons I decided to hold my tongue and to seek my own means for causing the infernal scheme to miss its aim. I reckoned that as I was to have a principal part assigned to me I could, by my own effort, either through apparent stupidity or by wilful design, wreck the whole project; and with this object I thought carefully over every detail intrusted to me.

The scheme was ingenious and, save in one respect, simple enough. A fortnight later the emperor was to pay a visit to Moscow, and already preparations had been begun for his reception. At one time it was thought he would refuse to come because of the Tueski murder; but with that unerring accuracy that always made me marvel, till I ascertained the cause, the Nihilist leaders learned the imperial intentions before they were known in some of even the closest official circles.

What the Czar decided to do was to have all the preparations carried on as though the original arrangement for the visit were to be carried out, but at the last moment to make a change which would baffle any plots. He meant to alter the arrangement of the train by which he would travel, and this at the very last moment.

The object of this was of course to thwart any plot that might be laid to attack the train in which he traveled, and thereby discover the plotters.

But the double cunning of the Nihilists was quite equal to this change; and the plot was indeed exactly what the officials had anticipated—to wreck the train in which the Czar traveled—and I think it was chosen for the very reason of its apparent obviousness. Given precise information of the imperial movements and a little double cunning in the plans, it was likely enough that the authorities would be especially vulnerable in just that spot in which they believed they had most effectively guarded themselves.

The official reasoning was that if the train in which the Czar was publicly but erroneously believed to be traveling could pass safely, then that in which his majesty would actually be, would be sure to get by without mishap. The Nihilists' plans were laid in full knowledge of the official theory.

A part of the line about ten miles from the city was chosen, where the rails ran in a dead straight course over a comparatively flat country for some five or six miles, and it was chosen because it was the spot which the authorities would the least suspect, since it was most easy to watch and guard. A man standing at either end of the long, flat stretch could with a glass watch not only the line itself, but also the land adjoining the line. Of all the spots the train would pass this was by far the unlikeliest to be selected for any Nihilist attack.

The most prominent and conspicuous spot of all was that moreover which was picked out for the actual attempt. At that particular point a shallow dip in the fields caused the line to be embanked to a height of some ten or twelve feet; and the key of the plan was to fix levers to two of the rails so that they could be moved at the very last moment, just when the train was within a few yards of them. In this way the train would be turned off the metals and sent over the embankment into the fields.

The levers, worked by electric motive power, were of course out of sight under the wooden sleepers; and the wires were trailed in tubes down inside the embankment and away through field drains to a house more than half a mile distant from the line where the operators were to remain until after the "accident."

When the train fell over the embankment into the field my work was to be done. I was told that I should be in charge of the soldiers who would be told off to guard that part of the line; and I was to draw my men up round the emperor and, under the guise of protecting and helping him, was to make a clear way for the assassins to do their work, in the event of the emperor not being killed by the "accident."

Personally, I did not dislike the scheme, because I thought I could see several ways in which I could prevent any fatal outcome, should I have to remain in the country long enough to compel me to take part in it. It would be easy enough for me to appear to lose my head at the last moment, for instance, and so bungle matters that the men who were to kill the emperor would be in fact prevented from approaching him.

But there was also in this a desperate personal risk to myself. I knew that these men would be picked from among the most reckless and daring spirits in the empire; men suffering under the grossest personal wrongs as well as inspired by the wildest political fanaticism. To them the blood of either friend or foe was as nothing if it stood in the way of what their unbalanced minds deemed justice and right.

It was thus a perilous and slippery eminence to which I had been thrust, and it increased infinitely the hazard of my course.

My thoughts therefore returned to the idea of flight with redoubled incentive; and a circumstance occurred which seemed to promise me some help in this direction.

A letter came to me from "Hamylton Tregethner," Olga's brother. He had escaped, as we knew, and had made his way to Paris. He was going on, he said, to America as soon as he had enjoyed himself; and when he found himself in New York, he purposed to change his name and nationality once more and be a Pole.

"I have not had many adventures," he wrote; "nor do I seem to have met many men who know me. But I had one encounter that was rather amusing. I was at breakfast and saw a man staring hard at me from the other side of the room. I thought he might be a friend and so I did not look at him. But he would not take his eyes from me, and when I left the table he followed and spoke to me. 'Hamylton, old man, I did not know you at first. You're looking frightfully ill and altered. You're not going to cut me.' This gave me a cue, though I did not understand all he said, when he added something about 'on account of somebody's conduct.' I did cut him, however; looked him hard in the face and curling my lip as if in profound contempt, I turned on my heel. I had the curiosity to ask afterwards who he was, and they gave me his name as the Hon. Rupert Balestier. I suppose I know him, but I thought the best way was not to speak. I did not shake him off, however, for that night he saw me again just when I was speaking English to some other men. I saw him listening as if he could not believe his ears; and as soon as I was alone he came up and asked me who I was and what right I had to masquerade as his old friend, Hamylton Tregethner. For answer I gave him another stare and got away. Then I changed my hotel and am going away from Paris for a few days. I do not intend to be bothered by the man."

My first impression of this incident was that it boded further danger. I knew Balestier. He was a man of great resolution, and if he imagined that any one was masquerading in my name in Paris, he would think nothing of rousing both the English and Russian embassies; or of coming on to Moscow himself to probe the thing to the bottom. He loved mysteries; was most active, energetic, and enterprising; and nothing would suit him better than to have imported into his rather purposeless life some such task as a search for me half over Europe. He was quite capable, too, of jumping to the conclusion that the man he had met had murdered and was personating me; and in a belief of the kind he was just the one to raise the hue and cry in every police office on the Continent.

What the real Alexis called "speaking English" was of course bad enough to brand him anywhere as an impostor should he try to pass himself off as an Englishman. Balestier had no doubt listened in amazement to this strange jargon coming from lips that looked like mine; and the extraordinary likeness and "my" peculiar conduct would quite complete his perplexity.

Probably I should hear more of the matter; and this set me considering whether I could not manage in some way to communicate with Balestier and get him to help in smuggling Olga across the frontier. He would revel in the work if I could only find him.

I turned to "Tregethner's" letters, therefore, to find the name of the hotel, and to my infinite annoyance the fool had not mentioned it; while his

intention to run away from Paris and Balestier would cause more delay. The fellow was not only a coward but an idiot as well; and I could have kicked him liberally, if my foot could only have reached from Moscow to Paris.

As it was, Balestier, with the best will in the world, would probably be blundering about and plunging me still deeper into the mud, when he not only could, but would, have given me valuable help if I could have got at him to tell him what to do.

I felt like Tantalus when I thought of it.

CHAPTER XVII.—AN EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE.

THE second complication was a much bigger matter; and it was of so strange a description and fraught with consequences of such critical importance to Olga and myself that of all my experiences of that time it deserves to be classed as the most remarkable. Like all else then, it came quite unsought by me, and as the direct and unavoidable consequence of the first step in my new life—the duel with Devinsky and my consequent repute as a swordsman.

A day or two after Tueski's funeral, and while the city was still quivering and staggering under the effects of the supposed Nihilist blow, a great ball took place at the Valniski Palace.

Count Valniski was among the richest men in Moscow, bidding hard for power and courting popularity right and left among all classes. To this ball all the officers of my regiment were invited, together with many of their friends. Among the latter Olga had a card; and although we were certainly in a poor mood for a function of the kind, we felt it expedient to do what all the world was doing, lest by remaining away we should attract attention to ourselves.

It was a very brilliant affair, as these big Russian balls always are, and the crowd included many of the best and smartest people in Moscow. I moved about the rooms, not dancing much, but exchanging a word now and then with my brother officers and with other people who claimed acquaintance with me.

Olga had plenty of partners among my comrades, and as she was dancing with one of them I stood watching her and thinking how completely I had dropped into the new social grooves of this Moscow life and how quickly my first feelings of strangeness had worn off, when my friend Essaeff came up to me.

"Alexis, I have a commission that concerns you," he said.

"Well?"

"You're in luck. Try and guess."

"Can't," I replied, shaking my head. "Unless the war's broken out and I'm to have a step. What is it?"

"There's a woman in it. High up, too." There were only two women in Moscow I ever thought about; and one of them I wished to see safe out of Russia and the other anywhere out of my way.

"Give it up," I said, with a smile.

"It's that smile of yours fetches 'em, I believe," said Essaieff, smiling in his turn. "It makes your face one of the pleasantest things in the world to look at." He had ripened quickly into a very familiar friend and we were great chums now.

"What is there you want me to do, old man? You wouldn't waste that flower of speech for nothing."

"Well, something's done it. I have been asked to present you to one of the wealthiest, most beautiful, and most influential women in Moscow—the Princess Weletsky; and asked in terms which seemed to imply that the honor of the introduction will be conferred on her."

"The Princess Weletsky? Who is she?" I inquired in absolute ignorance.

"That's just like you, Alexis. I'm getting to know that sweet innocence of yours. Whenever I mention a name that all Russia knows, you make the same lame show and ask who's he, or who's she? You've heard of her a thousand times. You can't help hearing of her. You couldn't if you tried."

"All right," I laughed, to turn my mistake. "Have you been talking about me?" He laughed at the idea.

"Why, man, where are your wits? Do you think the princess and I are on gossiping terms. I'm only the fly on the wheel in this. She wishes to know you; I do know you; she once sent me a card for one of her assemblies and snubbed me in a high bred manner; now she can use me and accordingly I am paraded for duty—to introduce you. Come along or she'll be getting some court executioner to cut my throat for loitering."

I followed him, wondering what it could mean; and half a minute later was presented to one of the most lovely and stately women I have ever seen. A queenly woman, indeed, and I should have been an icicle if I had not admired her. I have seen many lovely women of all types, but in all my life none to compare with the exquisite magnificence of this Russian beauty.

Her reception of me could not have been more cordial had I been one of the greatest of Russia's nobles, or had she begun to entertain some strong favor for me.

I asked for the honor of a dance and she gave me her program, telling me I might write my name where I would. As it was empty, this seemed a generous invitation; but I scribbled my initials against two dances, and was then going to move off.

She glanced at the program and smiled. I cannot describe the effect which a smile produced on her face.

"I had purposely kept the next dance for you, lieutenant," she said. "But I see your reputation has not belied you."

"My reputation?"

"Yes. But I have much I should like to say to you. I have heard of you often; as a daring man even among Russia's most daring; and as modest as brave."

"Rumor is often an unreliable witness," said I.

"She has not always spoken so kindly of you, lieutenant. But to see you is enough to prove the truth of her tales."

We danced that dance, and she declared that I waltzed better than any man in the room; and at the close of the dance she asked me to take her to one of the conservatories. We sat there during two dances until the first that I had initialed came, and then we danced again.

All the time she fascinated me with her manner and the infinite subtlety with which she implied the admiration she felt for my bravery, my skill as a soldier and a swordsman, my strength—everything in short; while she was loud in the expressions of the interest which she said she should take in my future.

At the close of the dance she sent me to fetch my sister; and when I presented her she made Olga sit down at her side and presently sent me away, saying that women's friendship ripened much more quickly when they were alone—especially if they were interested in the same man. All of which would have been very sound philosophy, had Olga been my sister in reality.

Essaieff had been watching me, and now chaffed me a good deal about my "conquest," and grew enthusiastic about my future.

"By Gad, man, she's as rich as a grand duke; and there is no limit to the height her husband may not climb. Play your cards well now; and you've got all the pluck—aye, and the brains too, if you like to use them; and you'll be war minister before I apply for my colonelcy."

I laughed lightly, but I thought to myself that if he only knew the skeletons in my cupboard that were gibbering and rattling their bones in mockery of me, he wouldn't tell quite such an enthusiastic fortune for me.

When I went back for my next dance with the princess, Olga was just being led away by a handsome young partner whom the princess had secured for her.

"Olga is most delightful," she said, with one of her smiles. "She is worthy of—any one; and a most enthusiastic sister. She is the most genuine soul I ever knew. She will be my dear friend, when her reserve has worn off." I thought I knew the cause of the "reserve," but I kept the thought to myself.

I did not think that at such a time any woman on earth could have exercised so strong an influence over me in the course of no more than an hour or two; and when we sat together after our last dance for a few minutes before she left, I felt I would have done almost anything on earth she asked to serve her. Something that she said drew from me a rather random protestation to this effect, and she reddened and started, and then, after a rapid searching glance shot into my face, she sat silent, fingering her fan restlessly. While doing this her program caught her attention.

She looked at it, and held it so that I could read it.

"No name but yours," she said, almost in a whisper. I saw this was so. Then she broke the silken cord by which it was fastened to her wrist, and with another glance at me she put it away into her bosom.

It was a little action, but from such a woman what did it not mean? I was amazed.

Another long pause followed.

Then she laid her hand in mine and looked straight at me.

"Are you really a brave man?" she asked. I seemed to take fire under her touch and look.

"That is not a question a man can answer for himself. Test me."

"If your sister were insulted, would you fight for her?" She little knew the cord she had touched, or guessed how the reference cooled me.

"I have already done so," I returned.

"In days of old men fought for any woman who was wronged. Would you?"

"I have done it before now," I answered, still thinking of Olga, and my thoughts for some reason slipped back to the first meeting on the Moscow platform.

She paused and looked away from me for a moment as if hesitating; and then leaning close to me that I could feel her warm breath on my cheek as she spoke, while her grasp tightened on my arm, she said in a tone of deep feeling:

"I have been wronged. You see me here as I am and what I am, but save for the happiness you have made me feel in being with you, I am the most wretched woman in all Russia. Will you help me? Dare you?" And she seemed to hang on my words as she waited for my reply, her eyes searching mine as if to read my answer there.

I was about to reply with a pledge inspired by the enthusiasm with which she had fired me, when my instinctive caution restrained me. She was quick to see my moment's hesitation, and not willing to risk a refusal, she added hastily:

"We cannot talk of this here. I ought not to have spoken of it now; but you seem to have drawn my very soul from me. Come to me tomorrow to my house. I will be alone at three. You will come—my friend?" And indescribable solicitude spoke through her last two words, all suggestive of infinite trust in me.

"Certainly," I cried. "And certainly your friend, if I dare."

She answered with a glance; and then seemed to cast aside her excitement. Rising she let me lead her back to the ballroom.

When I left her there were others round us, but as she bowed I caught a glance and the whispered words:

"I trust you."

I turned away half bewildered, and went home at once, pondering what was to be the upshot of this new development.

CHAPTER XVIII.—THE REASON OF THE INTRIGUE.

WHEN I was alone, and the strange charm of the Princess Weletsky's presence had given way to calm reflection, my doubts began to grow. I was naturally a cautious man under ordinary circumstances: and now my suspicions were the keener because my caution had been momentarily lulled to sleep.

I was all inclined to disbelieve the story which the priucess had told, or rather had suggested; and I began to look behind all she had said for some motive or intrigue. I thought she might wish for the help of my sword for some altogether different purpose than she had suggested; but I could think of nothing. Nor could Olga, with whom I spoke very freely on the subject.

She said she could see no more than appeared on the surface; and what that was it was superfluous to ask; especially when she told me that the princess could or would talk of nothing else to her but my bravery, my good looks, my courtesy, my chivalry, and so on, at great length.

"It is agreeable to have my brother praised," said Olga once, laughing. "But there are limits."

During the next four or five days Olga had ample opportunities of hearing these praises, moreover, as the princess would scarcely let her out of her sight. When I called on the day following the ball, I found the two together, and the princess, in the few words we had together out of my sister's hearing, would say nothing at all about the subject of her wrongs. She enlarged on the suggestion of the previous night that she had been led by her impulses and her instinctive trust in me to speak too fully.

For some days she maintained the same attitude of reserve, and then quite suddenly, when we were alone, she changed again and in words which I could not fail to understand she let me know indirectly that if I would avenge her wrongs, her hand would be my reward.

I have never in my life had to face a more awkward crisis than that. What reply she expected I cannot tell: whether she looked for some eager, passionate protestations of love, or some strong pledge of defense, or what. Whether she really cared for me and the confusion she showed was the sign of it, or whether the whole part was assumed and everything mere acting, I cannot say. But I know that I on my part felt indescribably embarrassed and scarcely knew who to answer her.

I knew the danger to Olga and myself of offending a woman so highly placed, so influential and powerful as the princess. We had enough troubles as it was; and if they were to be multiplied and aggravated in this way, we should be overwhelmed. It was certain that I must find some way of temporizing.

"Princess, I am your devoted servant to do with as you will," I answered. "And if my sword can be of service, tell me how." She started and flushed with pleasure as I said this.

"I knew I should not count on you in vain. The Grand Duke Servanieff will now learn that a more stalwart arm than his protects me from his insults." Her eyes seemed to glitter as she watched the effect of this name on me.

"Do you mean that that is the man you wish me to fight?" I cried in the deepest astonishment. He was all but on the very steps of the throne, and if I had approached him he would have brushed me away into a jail with no more concern or difficulty than he would have whisked a fly off his hand.

The woman was mad.

"He persists in forcing his attentions on me, and I will not have them," she said.

All my suspicions had been stung into activity by the mention of the name of the grand duke; and as I looked at her she appeared to be watching me too closely to be natural as she added: "He cannot refuse to meet any one to whom I give the right to protect me from him."

It was an intrigue, I was sure of it; and this lovely woman was making me her tool. I answered guardedly.

"A lieutenant in a marching regiment who should presume to challenge that man would stand a better chance of being whipped at the cart's tail than of meeting him."

"He is a great swordsman, I know," she said, as if to pour suspicion on my courage. But I was not a fool to be tripped up by a gibe. If I had wished to marry the woman I would have consented readily enough there and then and risked all; but my object was to get out of Russia and to get Olga out with me.

"I should not fear him were he twice as skilful; but this is no mere matter of sword fence."

"Easy words, lieutenant."

"I will make them good, princess," replied I quietly. "But I must first see the course clearer for the meeting. What say your friends? Can I depend on their influence?"

"Won't you do this for me, then? Am I mistaken in you?" There was a sharp accent of irritation in her tone that I noticed now.

"Princess, it does not best become a beautiful woman to doubt a man's courage until he is proved a craven. Here is no matter of personal courage only; but I should be loosing upon me all the waters of bitterest political intrigue. Alone I should be absolutely powerless to stem the torrents that would sweep me to certain ruin. Alone, therefore, I cannot do what you ask. But understand me, give me the powerful support of your family, and I will meet the man, were he fifty times the highness that he is—if we can arrange the meeting."

She seemed disappointed at this—quite unreasonably so—and tried to move me. But I stood firm, and then with evident reluctance she told me her brother was with her in the matter, and that if I would see him all would be simple.

"My brother, Prince Bilbassoff, is, as you know, Minister of the Interior, and is now in Moscow in connection with the visit of the emperor." I had not known who her brother was, but when she gave me the name and told me where I could see him, a rapid conclusion leaped into my thoughts.

Prince Bilbassoff was the real power behind the police, and I was probably going to find now why Christian Tueski had had to hold his hand against me.

I went at once to see him. I found him the very opposite of the popular ideal of a bureaucrat—a short, gray, close haired, spare man, with the air of a man of the world, and a pleasant, cheery manner that suggested nothing formidable or even powerful. Yet without doubt the man was in many respects the most powerful and the most feared in all Russia.

He appeared to be expecting me, for the instant I was announced he got up and welcomed me with a hearty shake of the hand and said :

"I thought my sister would have to make us acquainted, Lieutenant Petrovitch. She said she wouldn't, but I expected you. Women think beauty will do everything, and somehow are always calculating without the effects of self interest. Don't you think so?" He spoke with a sort of easy club mannerism, and just let his eyes rest a moment on my face.

"Of course you know the drift of what has passed, then?"

"Of course I do. As well as I know that your coming to me means that my sister's method has failed. I from the first disagreed with it. I know a great deal about you, Lieutenant Petrovitch, and I think I could have saved time. But my sister was attracted to you—women always like you handsome young fire eaters, especially women like my sister—and as she is to take a rather large hand in the matter, she wanted to play it her own way. She appealed to your feelings, lieutenant. I should have gone straight to your interest; and really it will be to your interest to do this."

"Will you tell me plainly what is wanted?"

"Certainly. The death of the man whose name has no doubt been mentioned to you."

"Why?"

"Not because he has insulted my sister, though that is fortunately a plausible pretext; but because he is a menace to the empire."

His bluntness astounded me.

"Do you take me for an assassin?"

"No. I take you for a very resolute young man, with a great skill of fence, a large desire to push your fortunes high, and not too much scruple to act like a sword scabbard between your legs and trip you up. If you weren't that, you'd be no use to me. As you are, I open before you a career such as lies before no other man in the emperor's wide dominions."

"And if I refuse?"

He laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"You won't refuse," he said, shaking his head. "If you do, you will be a young fool—too foolish to be trusted at large."

I knew what he meant; and when I looked at him next, I understood why men feared him. That laugh of his would usher a man to the knout or the gallows.

I thought rapidly.

"I like the project," I replied. "But can you arrange the meeting?"

He was quick as a flash and detected the false note in my voice.

"Lieutenant, there are two courses open to you," he said in a tone so sharp, stern, and ringing that the change surprised me. "You can accept or refuse the offer—but don't try to fool me."

"Well, then, I'm not a murderer," I rapped out, angered by his words.

"That's better," he said, with a return to his light, clubbish manner. "But this is no murder. The man is a traitor, and no juster act could be compassed than his death."

"Then why not do it openly?"

"Is justice always done openly? Of course we might do that, but he would laugh at our efforts. We might get him assassinated; but he is too powerful and the noise of the act would defeat the very object we have in view. He is a swordsman worthy of your skill."

I sat thinking, but not in the groove he guessed.

"We'll make your sister's fortune as well," he said, raising the terms. "She shall make a marriage into one of the best families in Russia, and found a family of the highest distinction. Think, lieutenant."

I was thinking about as hard as I could, but no opening offered itself.

"I must have time to determine," I said. "It seems to me that I run the chance of playing the catspaw with all the flame for my share. What guarantee have I that if I do this and am successful I shall not then be deemed—too foolish to be trusted at large, as you say?"

"First my honor; secondly, your betrothal to my sister; and thirdly, her feeling for yourself."

"And if I refuse; Siberia, I suppose?"

"No, not so far as that," he replied lightly.

"But what if I feign to consent and carry the story to the man you threaten?"

"There is that chance, of course. But in the first place he would not believe you, lieutenant; and in the second, if he did, neither you nor he could do any harm: and in the third, you would have me for an enemy. And I am pleasanter as well as safer as a friend."

"How long will you give me to decide?"

"A week. We can then announce the betrothal just before the emperor's visit here, and gain the imperial blessing on so righteous a marriage—between a brave man and a beautiful woman, each motivated by the highest patriotic feelings for Russia."

With this half sneer ringing in my ears, he sent me away.

I went home in a very unenviable frame of mind; and my temper was not improved by meeting my old opponent, Devinsky, near my rooms.

For the moment I was powerless to think of any possible means of relief. My helplessness was so complete as to be almost ludicrous; and if it had not been for Olga, I would have just let myself be dragged along by the singular chain of events which had coiled themselves round me.

I must rouse myself to some sort of effort for her sake, I saw that of course. But a couple of hours' thinking only increased my utter perplexity, and I went off to bed to try if sleep would clear my wits.

I resolved to see Olga the next day as soon as possible after my regimental duties were over. There was but one thing possible. She must go at once, and we must try to hit on some plan by which she could escape at any hazard. But my regimental work was heavier than usual, and when it was over a meeting of the officers was called in reference to the impending visit of the Czar. It was thus late in the afternoon before I could go to Olga.

At the house, astounding news awaited me.

Arthur W. Marchmont.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

AN AMATEUR IN DYNAMITE.

A summer experience which fills a big space in the memory of a certain young machinist—
The expedient to which his fiancée resorted to counteract the mischievous
influence of a professional agitator.

THE long hot day was done, and the seething ocean of human life on the East side seemed to have boiled up out of the fetid apartments of the tenement houses, through the scuttleholes, and spread over the roofs. Weary men sprawled at full length, smoking their pipes; women gossiped and nursed their babies; lovers perched on the cope stones of partition walls; children played games and ran races, in apparent unconsciousness of the abyss bordering their field; "growler" parties sang popular ballads. The air vibrated with a myriad of voices in speech, laughter, song, and quarrel, all swelling together in one great human chord, as pervasive and diffuse as the faintly golden haze doming the city, the sky's reflection of its million lights.

Gottlieb Hebick a stalwart young machinist, and Otilie Boldtner, a pretty, flaxen haired, and blue eyed feather worker, sat together upon the partition wall of the two huge buildings that constituted the gruesome flats. He, bestriding the cope stone, was in his shirt sleeves, but that was no infraction of etiquette, for his coat lay upon his knees. She, sitting sidewise upon the wall, facing him, seemed occupied with making plaits in the hem of her apron.

"You're right, of course," said the young man gloomily. "There would be some risk in it. But, it's hard, within a week of our wedding, to have it knocked in the head. I had set my heart upon it and saved up enough for a nice little home and a fair start. I was going to get the furniture next week. We might chance it."

"No, Gottlieb; I am as sorry as you are; but, just think. Suppose we have our home and you can get no work, and our little savings are all gone and nothing coming in. Then the home will have to go, and I have to come back to my father, and you must go away somewhere and look for work; and maybe we shall never see each other again. You know how it was with the poor Meissners, and Gretchen Detweiler and her man, and more we have seen, all good, honest, hard working people. Maybe your shop will soon start up again, and then I will not say 'No,' any more, but 'Yes,' as soon as you like."

"But suppose the strike lasts for months; as strikes sometimes do?"

"Then it would be a great deal worse for us married, that as we are. But now you call it a strike, and a little bit ago you spoke of it as a lockout. Which is it?"

"Both. Colonel Withers—the superintendent—posted notice of a ten per cent cut in wages, because of dull times. Other manufacturers were glutting the market with goods at cost or below, to raise money, and the Vulcan works would have to cut or quit."

"Yes. Times are bad, I know that. Everybody does."

"Some of us were willing to stand the cut until business picked up, but others would not and when it was carried to the union, a strike was ordered."

"On the principle that no bread at all is better than nine tenths of a loaf."

"I don't suppose they looked at it in exactly that way. At all events, when the committee called on Colonel Withers, he just said 'All right' and posted up another notice closing the works. That made the strike a lock-out."

"And there wouldn't have been any lockout if the union had not ordered a strike?"

"No, I suppose not—if the men had stood the cut."

"You men make me tired."

"I didn't favor a strike myself, and I guess nearly all the men in the works, under the circumstances, after a growl would have let the ten per cent go, but the union wouldn't allow it."

"So it was decided for you by those not directly concerned?"

"Well, we have to stand by the union, you know."

"Will the union feed those it stops from earning their bread?"

"If it has the funds, yes; but some would go hungry rather than take its money. I would."

"And if the works start again with new hands, who are not strikers, what becomes of you men?"

"We will have to do the best we can."

"Will the union find work for you?"

"Oh, no! It is not for that."

Ottillie pondered. She was vaguely conscious of the imperative obligation to "stand by the union," but it was less a live issue to her mind than to her lover's. Her father, a piano maker, and her brother, a violinist, both belonged to unions, and she had heard "the union" spoken of with a sort of reverence all her life, yet she could not see that it ever did anything but interfere with people making a living.

Gottlieb went off to a meeting of the late employees of the Vulcan works. A "growler" party, two roofs away, broke up in a row. The playing children grew sleepy and lachrymose. Men began dragging up mattresses from their rooms, to sleep on. Women disappeared, Ottillie among them, with the duty of "standing by the union" still a matter of question in her mind.

* * * * *

The strikers met in the long, low ceilinged hall back of the "Liederliche Kleeblatt" saloon. A piano stood in one corner and the walls were decorated with prize wreaths won in vocal contests by the little singing societies that rehearsed and drank beer here two nights in each week. There was a

small platform used by speakers at strikers' meetings, but which could be taken apart and removed easily to give more room for the Sunday night dances. A big hole in the partition wall between the hall and the bar room facilitated the supply of beer on all occasions.

When Gottlieb entered, the smoke was so thick that he could only see those nearest to him, but when his eyes grew a little accustomed to it, he made out that Schmidt was making the report of the committee that had waited on Colonel Withers. Everybody knew all about it already, but listened intently to its formal presentation, which occupied some time, as Schmidt was fond of details and had much indignation to express. Then, everybody talked at once and there was much rattling of beer mugs to summon waiters. A few of the older men muttered to each other that it was bad business as the time was ill chosen for a strike, but seemed fearful of being overheard uttering such treason against the union.

Gottlieb, less prudent and still under Ottillie's influence, was strongly minded to say the same thing out boldly, but was diffident about trying to make a speech, and while he hesitated the platform was taken by a speaker who, in a shrill voice that was almost a shriek, compelled attention by the cry:

"Brothers! Fellow slaves! The issue is life or death!"

The utterer of that hysterical exordium was not one of the strikers, but Gottlieb knew him by sight as Max Finkelmaier, a stormy petrel of the labor sea, whose screams were to be heard wherever trouble between masters and men could be fomented. He was supposed to have a trade, but nobody knew what it was. By virtue of his permanent attitude of revolt against toil, he assumed to consider himself a sort of *ex officio* member of all bodies of strikers. Whether cloak makers or plasterers, marble cutters, musicians, horseshoers, or waiters were "out," Max was sure to be found among them, always making furious speeches. Each strike in turn was a "sacred cause," and he never neglected to mention that the "bloated aristocrats" were "fattening on the hearts' blood" of his hearers. He was in demand, for strike leaders found him useful in stimulating flagging ardor among their followers, and some evenings he had two or three sacred causes, for each of which he was ready to "bare his breast to the tyrant's steel."

Gottlieb listened, at first with mere curiosity, then with interest, and finally, as if fascinated. In the animation of oratory, Max' black, reptilian eyes seemed to sparkle, his long nose to curl sinuously, his snaky locks to lash the air like whips, and his lean figure to quiver with an energy too fierce for words. One of his sentences that particularly impressed Gottlieb was: "Your purse proud master, who refuses even consideration to your bitter wrongs, cares nothing that, on his blood stained way to wealth, his iron feet crush human hearts, stamp life out of the tender flowers of love and hope that lie in his path." It seemed as if Max must be referring to Ottillie. How was the young man to know Max always said this when a strike committee had been repulsed?

The strike—or lockout—lasted long and the men met often. Max and Gottlieb became almost inseparable companions. The young man's savings, in-

stead of furnishing a home for Ottilie, were steadily and rapidly undergoing conversion into beer, for allaying the unslakable thirst of the agitator, whose diatribes against "Capital, Church, and State, the Satanic Trinity in Unity," made his throat dry all the time.

Herr Boldtner, the piano maker, a stolid, elderly German, not much given to talking, shook his head gravely when he heard Gottlieb repeat, parrot-like, the evil and violent talk of his friend, but wasted no words in argument. Only, when he was gone, the old man would say to Ottilie, "Some day he does a big foolishness and comes by Sing Sing, sure."

The girl, whose apprehensions were already awakened by the too painfully evident change in her lover's formerly abstemious habits, was not a little alarmed by her father's prophecy, and set herself to watch for and, if possible, arrest before it went too far, the "foolishness" that would lead to such a bad end. Gottlieb, she well knew, was not naturally an Anarchist, but Max's influence upon his impressionable nature was fast making him one. "And," she said to herself, "he will put Gottlieb up to do something awful that will land him in jail, while he sits safe in the dark." A prognostication much more correct and nearer to realization than she imagined.

She tried reasoning with him, against his reflection of Max' specious sophistries, but with little or no effect. He loved her, but said to himself, "Of course a woman could not see what necessity demands men shall do against the capitalistic tyrants. The thought of fire and blood would frighten her, and she would faint at sight of a spoonful of dynamite."

One very hot night Ottilie's six year old brother, Hugo, was feverish and slept badly. About midnight he cried for water and Ottilie, who was as a mother to him, got up to supply his want. To do so, she had to enter the kitchen, the rear room of the flat, and was momentarily startled by finding it alight with the reflected glare of gas from a window facing her, in the next extension of the building. That window was Gottlieb's, as she well knew, having often talked with him across the eight feet wide air space. In front of each window—his and hers—was a fire escape balcony, rather rickety, as such structures are apt to be on old houses, and lumbered with miscellaneous utensils and débris.

Fearing her lover might be ill, she looked across. He was fully dressed, as if he had just come in, and in the act of taking from a coat pocket a small package, that he laid very gingerly upon the table before which he stood. Then he began taking something else from another pocket, but stopped suddenly to look at the gas flame, as if it suggested an apprehension, under the impulse of which he cautiously moved the package to the end of the table farthest from the light and covered it with his hat. The something else he next produced was simply a cylinder of metal, four or five inches long and probably two in diameter. With his strong fingers he unscrewed a plug that fitted one end of it and peered inside. It was empty and he laid it down.

The last thing he put on the table was what looked to Ottilie like a coil of thick black string, with a bit of bright metal at one end. Before these objects he stood motionless several minutes, regarding them gloomily, as if

in a reverie. Then seeming to suddenly remember that his window was open, he started, stepped quickly to it, and looked out. All was silence and darkness. Ottilie, in her unlighted kitchen, would not have been seen by him, even had she not moved to one side, as she did. Reassured, he drew down the shade, and in a few minutes the extinguishing of his light indicated that he had gone to bed.

Ottilie waited for him to fall asleep. She knew intuitively what was in that package and the thought of what it might do made her shudder. Ever since he had been repeating Max's mouthings against the "tyrants" she had expected it. But she would save him, in spite of himself, if her woman's wit was equal to her love and courage.

When she deemed time enough had elapsed for him to be asleep, she set to work. From its place beneath the stationary tubs she drew a long, but narrow, ironing board, carried it to the balcony and rested its ends on the light iron railings, crossing the abyss like a bridge. That it was insecure she knew very well. The railings did not deserve much confidence; if the board should bend with her weight in the middle, it would be likely to slip off; it was a narrow path for anybody but a rope dancer to tread in the dark; and the stone flagging of the yard was full fifty feet below; yet the only reflection that made the brave girl hesitate, even a moment, was "If anybody should see me going across to Gottlieb's window, what would be thought?"

With light, quick steps she crossed the chasm, reached his window and groping beneath the blind upon the table, which was within easy reach, took the package from under Gottlieb's hat. Tightly clutching her prize, she recrossed the treacherous bridge—which she temporarily drew in and laid upon the balcony—and regained her own apartments.

With the shade carefully drawn down and the gas lighted, she examined the package. A stout manilla paper wrapping inclosed about a pound of a queer, yellowish brown granular stuff, that had a damp, greasy feel, a sickly, sulphurous odor, and a sweetish taste. She had never seen dynamite before, but had no doubt of this being, as she reflected, "the slumbering devil that Max teaches the poor fools will wake up to right all their wrongs."

Now that she had it, what should she do with it? If she were simply to destroy it, Max would supply more; Gottlieb would know she could not betray him, and would yet do some dreadful thing. Her sense of the responsibility she had assumed in sharing his guilty secret became agonizing. All at once an inspiration came to her, as good ideas always come to those whose souls in great travail seek them. She would make some innocent dynamite, which would be much safer for Gottlieb to handle than the real stuff, and it would go hard if she could not find some way of giving him a salutary lesson from its employment. And this is how she made dynamite from her domestic materials.

In a large bowl she put a quantity of yellow corn meal equal to that of the dynamite. It was too light in color, but a sepia cake—from Hugo's box of water colors—dissolved and mixed through it made that right. A little olive oil and brown sugar gave the greasy feel and sweetness of the original.

Soaking off the heads of a bunch of brimstone matches and adding a little of the dilute nitric acid her father kept for staining wood carvings, she perfumed the mess.

When her work was done, even an expert would have had to make some experiment to determine which of the two dynamites was real, and that Gottlieb would not detect the substitution, she felt well assured. The package remade, in the original wrapper, but with new contents, she put under the hat on Gottlieb's table, again traversing the plank, to and fro, for the purpose. Having stowed the ironing board away in its accustomed place, the last thing she did was mixing the dynamite with water, to the consistency of a thin gruel and pouring it down the sink, with enough water following to carry it well into the sewer and on its way to the sea.

"Now," she said triumphantly to herself, as she went back to bed, "let Gottlieb go a Max-ing if he will. He will do no harm and if he is caught it will not go so hard with him when they find what sort of dynamite he uses."

* * * * *

The next day, Gottlieb remained in his room until late in the forenoon. Ottilie knew when he went out and noted that it was full two hours later than his usual time, even since he had been out of work. She surmised and rightly, that he was occupied in putting her dynamite into the shell, which she well understood, from reading about such things in the newspapers, was meant to be a bomb.

It took him a long time to make up his mind to actually commence the work, and when he did, his awkwardness and excessive caution made him slow. But at last he finished the task, according to his instructions.

That afternoon he visited Ottilie, as usual, but was nervous, distraught, and preoccupied, as she had never seen him before. "It is for tonight," she said to herself, "and his conscience is troubling him already. Oh! If it could only speak loud enough to his mind to stop him, how glad I would be, and how proud of him!"

Unhappily Max's voice was louder in his mind than that of conscience. He took supper with the Boldtner family and made a great effort to be conversational and appear at his ease, but could not keep it up long and, soon after the meal was over, went out, saying he had a meeting to attend.

Ottilie watched all night for his home coming. He did not return until after five o'clock in the morning. She got a newspaper at as early an hour as possible, and anxiously scanned its columns, but the only dynamite events reported were a little real one in Spain and a bogus one in England. Nevertheless, she was not easy. Things happened sometimes, she knew, too late at night to be chronicled in the next morning's papers.

Gottlieb did not show himself until afternoon, and when he did, his appearance startled her. She did not believe that the loss of a night's sleep could have so affected him. Often she had seen him alert, bright, and jolly the morning after a whole night of dancing at a ball. But now he was haggard, his eyes were sunken and bloodshot, his face pale and drawn with sleep lines, and he was so nervous that his hands trembled.

"What is the matter with you, Gottlieb? Are you sick?" she exclaimed in alarm.

"No, I'm all right," he replied, with impatient gruffness that sounded strange from his lips. Soon he wanted to go out, but she positively forbade it and compelled him to remain with her. But to keep him, she had to threaten that if he went away then, he need never return to see her. A little after three o'clock she ran down to the street and bought an evening newspaper. On its first page her eyes caught at once the startling headlines.

ANOTHER DYNAMITE OUTRAGE.

STRIKERS ADOPTING ANARCHISTIC METHODS.

Fiendish Attempt to Blow up the Residence of Colonel Withers of the Vulcan Works.

She stopped outside long enough to read the article and chuckled at its conclusion:

The bomb was carefully opened by the intrepid sergeant, after it had been thoroughly soaked in water, and was found to contain more than a pound of dynamite. The cap attached to the fuse had evidently done its work and that it should have failed to set off the terrible explosive, with which it was in immediate contact, is simply miraculous and can only be regarded as an evidence of the direct interposition of Providence.

When Otilie returned to Gottlieb, she found him with his head bowed upon his arms, which were crossed upon the table before him, but at her sudden entrance he sprang to his feet, pale and trembling, with the look of a hunted man in his eyes. Affecting not to notice anything unusual in his demeanor, she exclaimed:

"Oh! Gottlieb! Such an awful thing! The Vulcan strikers have blown up Colonel Withers' house! Surely you did not know anything about that, did you?"

"Oh! Why—no—of course not—how should I?" he stammered.

"It was last night, and they used dynamite."

"And Colonel Withers?"

"Oh! He was not hurt. He was away from home."

"Thank God!" burst fervently from the young man's lips.

"But his sick wife and two poor little children, his little girl and a playmate who was spending the night with her——"

Gottlieb threw up his arms, with a hoarse, inarticulate cry, as of a beast in agony, and fell forward senseless upon the table. Otilie dashed water in his face, fanned him, held ammonia under his nose, and eventually restored him to consciousness, but not to his senses. She was frightened by the overwhelming effect of her story and, if he had given her a moment's time, when he came to himself, would have confessed how far she had perverted the newspaper's statement of facts. But as soon as he could breathe and move again, he struggled to his feet and staggered out, beating aimlessly with his open hands, like a man who is fighting for air. Otilie strove to detain him, but he broke loose from her hands and went away, seemingly deaf, though she called after him again and again.

When he had plunged almost headlong down the stairs, she stood still a few moments in dreadful uncertainty what to do, then ran back into the kitchen to watch for his appearance in his room. Presently he walked in like a drunken man, gesticulating wildly and muttering incoherently to himself as he staggered to and fro. Then, as if struck by a sudden resolution, he strode to the window and pulled down its shade.

Ottilie realized that the moment was one of supreme peril; that if she would prevent a desperate deed which would fill the rest of her life with heart breaking remorse, she had not a minute to lose. To run down the stairs and up those of the next house to his room would take too long; the leap from time to eternity can be made much more quickly.

Almost as quickly as the thought flashed into her mind, she had the board in place over the chasm, darted across it, pushed aside Gottlieb's blind and sprang into his room, through the window.

He sat at the table writing, and momentarily dashing away from his eyes the tears that were blinding him, deaf to her entrance and unconscious of her presence, though she stepped quickly behind him and looked over his shoulder. She read:

Farewell, beloved Ottilie; the longest of all farewells—forever—for I shall never see you again—either in this world or in heaven. I have done what God never will forgive, and I must never look upon your dear face any more. In a few moments I shall be among the lost, where I belong, and you—

"No! no! Gottlieb!" she cried, unable to restrain herself any longer, seizing the paper from under his hands and tearing it into shreds, "I will not have it so! You have done nothing of the sort! I tell you so; I, your Ottilie. Come—understand me—sit up—look at me."

She pushed him upright in his chair. He gazed dazedly at her for a moment, then throwing his arms about her, dropped his head upon her breast and burst into a passion of weeping and broken lamentations. She held and soothed him, until his excitement had in some degree exhausted itself, and then said to him:

"Come now, Gottlieb. Be yourself again. Be a man. Sit up straight and stop crying. It is enough. There; that is right. Now; do you know me? Do you know what I am saying to you?"

He nodded. He could not trust himself to speak. She went on: "Very well then; understand this—the bomb did not go off. I just made that story up. The colonel was away from home and the others were there, it is true, but they were not hurt and no harm was done at all, because, as I tell you, the bomb did not go off."

"But—the paper—and—I heard it."

"The paper says it did not. I only told it that way to make you know how bad you would feel if things had happened as they very well might had it been real dynamite."

"But—it was."

"No. Do you think I would have let you blow people up with real dynamite for that villain Max?"

"You let me? What did you know about it?"

"Everything. I made the dynamite."

He passed a hand over his brow with a gesture of hopeless confusion. Of course, he said to himself, none of this was real; the reality was the other—the horrible things; he had just gone crazy, and simply imagined Ottilie was with him, trying to soothe him by saying such kind but absurd things, and how strange it was that he could imagine all this and yet know he was crazy in doing so; and how good God was to let him be crazy this way, instead of making him hear that bomb and see that poor woman and the children!

But Ottilie, who had no idea of the gruesome fancies in his tortured brain, only saw that he was quiet and thought complete control of his mind was coming back to him. So she went on and told him all she had done; how she had divined the evil he was being led into and had watched him, had made the innocent dynamite and substituted it for the infernal sort—

"No, no!" he interrupted her, with a wild, frightened look, "I heard it. I lighted the long fuse and ran away very fast, far off, but I heard it! Oh! It was terrible! It seemed right behind me and the echoes followed me a great while."

"Gottlieb, you heard nothing but your conscience. The bomb could not go off. The paper says so. Come, I will show it to you when you come over. I told you it did that you should know how such a guilty man would feel."

Gradually, as she talked, his clear sense returned to him, and he knew the truth. He tried to tell her of his boundless gratitude, but words failed him, and he could only sob and repeat that she was his guardian angel.

"Then," she said, "will you promise your guardian angel you will have no more to do with that villain Max, or any of his kind."

"Yes! Yes! I promise it with all my heart and swear it before God. Not for nothing shall I have had such feelings as I know this day. Oh, to think of what I might be this minute but for you. Ottilie! *Liebchen!* How shall I be good enough to be worthy of your care for me?"

"You will go far away from here, in the first place. You have made some bad friends, and maybe some bad habits that are not good for you, since you have been out of work and I want you to leave them all—the friends and the habits."

"And you, Ottilie?"

"Would you not, if necessary—for a while?"

"A little while, if I must, yes; but I cannot any more trust myself much if you are not with me."

"I am not the one to argue you out of that idea. But here is your chance. My married sister, who lives in Montana, you know, writes to me that a fine opening is there for a good blacksmith who understands tool making, and you do—don't you?"

"Oh, very well. I can forge and temper as well as any man."

"Then there is where you must go."

"But, surely, that Montana is big enough for two?"

"You think so? Well—we will try."

J. H. Connelly.

THE GOLD DELUGE.*

Astounding consequences arising from the discovery of a chemist—Terror of the governments to whom unlimited gold meant destruction—The extraordinary lengths to which Erik Poulsen was driven to maintain his independence.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

ERIK POULSEN, a Danish chemist, after several years of experimenting, succeeds in discovering how to make gold. He is anxious to publish the formula to the world, but his government will not hear of it, declaring that it will overturn civilization. So he and his wife depart for Berlin, and here he is offered the crown of a small kingdom in exchange for his secret, to be the property of Germany. But he indignantly declines and leaves for Paris, where he proposes to lay the facts before the editor of a widely circulated journal of chemistry and reap the fame that is his due, even if he should thereby be bereft of the fortune his discovery has brought him. But here, too, he is made aware that he is under constant surveillance, to prevent the publication of his secret, and finally he retreats to a small, rocky island off the coast of Spain, where he broods over his powerlessness. Finally he builds a completely equipped steamer, the Chemeia, and seeks to escape to other lands. At once, however, a French and an English man of war are sent on his track, and although the former is outdistanced, the Madras begins to wreak destruction with her cannonade. In this crisis Erik loads a cannon with gun cotton, and although the risk to all on board the Chemeia is great, resolves to attempt the destruction of the enemy's searchlight. Szemsky, a member of the crew who has been on a Russian man of war, declares he is willing to risk his life in the firing of the charge, and proceeds to train the cannon.

CHAPTER XII.—NEARING THE SOUTH POLE.

SUDDENLY a thunderous, deafening crash reverberated from the center of the Chemeia's deck, and a bright red column of vivid fire shot past the side of the ship. At the same instant everything about them was wrapt in dense darkness, felt all the more on account of the glare of a moment before.

The electric searchlight of the English man o' war had been destroyed.

For a moment the crew and the officers all thought the Chemeia had been struck by one of the enemy's missiles—a large hole had been torn in the deck and a portion of the nearest cabin was blown away. When they realized that they themselves and their comrades were uninjured, they grasped the full meaning of all that had happened.

"You can foire like an angel!" Kelly cried joyfully, but the one addressed spoke not. He lay insensible and bleeding, near the torn and shattered cannon.

The night gradually neared its end.

All on board the Chemeia had retired for a few hours' rest, so badly needed after the terrible strain they had been under. The danger from pursuit and possible capture seemed averted for the time being. The second

*This story began in the June issue of THE ARGOSY. The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.

mate had the watch, and slowly he paced his post on the commander's bridge, keeping his weather eye on the search for danger, while the Spaniard Mendez had charge of the wheel, where he softly whistled a love song to while away the time.

"How is Szemsky?" Erik made haste to inquire, as soon as he appeared on deck.

"Shlapping loike a log, your excellency," Kelly replied. "Does not feel the shlightest pain 'cept in wan shoulder where he was sthruck. But here is the rascal hi'self!"

Szemsky actually turned out with the rest of the crew, looking very pale, it is true, but otherwise all right.

Erik stepped up to him and shook hands heartily.

"Thanks, Szemsky, a thousand thanks!" he said to the calmly smiling Pole, "and thanks to you all," turning to the others of the crew; "you all proved your sterling qualities as men."

"His excellency—three cheers for his excellency! Hip, hip—hurrah!" Kelly cried, and willingly all hands joined.

"And another cheer for Szemsky!" Erik exclaimed enthusiastically, and again the cheer was given with a hearty vim.

Erik ordered coffee served for himself and the officers of the ship in the little weather cabin on the commander's bridge, whence a free view could be had of the surrounding ocean. As far as the eye could reach, not a single sail, nor any smoke from steamers, could be discerned.

"Well, captain," Erik inquired, "where are we now?"

"Considering the frightful speed at which we traveled, I presume that we must be about near Cape Horn," Captain Alsloev replied. "I have now laid the course of the ship more to the west, to avoid that part of the polar territory which reaches up to the sixty first degree, and I propose that we go by way of the coast of Victoria Land direct to the south, where we will be perfectly safe."

"Very good," the first mate added; "that is also best, in my opinion, but—excuse me, if I ask—then—what?"

"Yes—what then?" the officers all repeated in chorus.

No one replied, and Erik stared thoughtfully out upon the great, undulating ocean.

Then suddenly the cabin entrance was darkened by the shadow of Erik's young wife, who entered and was respectfully saluted by the officers.

Erik explained to her in as few words as he could the problem with which they were confronted.

"We must in some manner or other get into communication with Europe," she said.

"But how?" Captain Alsloev asked smilingly. "In the southern latitudes there are neither post offices nor telegraph stations."

"No—fortunately not," Junker rejoined, "otherwise we would perhaps have visitors—unwelcome visitors on board, all too soon."

"Have we no possible chance of meeting some ship—a whaler, for instance?" the steward asked.

"That is the idea," Erik exclaimed joyfully. "We will bribe some whaler, and after swearing him to secrecy, have him deliver a packet to Professor Dulcis. We will then proceed further south to await results."

"Not a bad idea at all," Alsloev remarked, "but whether we will run across such a vessel, and whether the captain will agree to our proposition—that is the question."

"Gold," Jackson interposed, "makes all things possible."

"The time of year is also very favorable," Smith suggested. "If we only do not meet too many and have some one of them betray us."

"Yes, there is no doubt but that ship is after us at this very moment," the steward said.

"And that miserable Petterson," Smith continued, "if he was lucky enough to be taken on board of the man of war, undoubtedly made great haste to tell them all he knew."

"Bah, he knew nothing; at the most, that we would sail south, and that is a word full of flexible meaning. Meantime we have gained enough headway, and they will hardly pursue us to the pole."

The day passed quietly and without any events that would cause alarm. About noon the captain made an observation of the sun and reported that the ship was then about 57 degrees south latitude and a little over 91 degrees west longitude, and therefore the course was laid more to the southwest by west. In the afternoon a sail was descried towards the northwest which only appeared a short time on the horizon and soon vanished.

The Chemeia moved along rapidly, although its speed was nothing near that of the night before. Had this been kept up, Smith declared, they would have sailed around the earth in from ten to twelve days, provided the boiler did not explode.

Meanwhile Erik was busily engaged in his cabin, writing a detailed report of his discovery for Professor Dulcis and similar reports for the principal scientific societies of the world. These were to be given, by the person to be engaged, to the different post offices in Europe. To be more secure Erik wrote the treatises in such intricate scientific language that only the greatest expert could understand what it was all about.

New life, hope, and ambition had awakened in Erik. He charmed those around him by his frank, hearty laugh, and the glad, happy look came back to his eyes once more.

Days went by, and one morning when Erik, as was his custom, appeared early on deck with his wife, he noticed the captain looking towards the east in an eager fashion through his glass. Erik stepped up to him quickly and gazed in the same direction.

Far out, as far as it was possible to distinguish objects, land had been discovered. Clear and white as snow, the sharp edges of mountain chains were distinctly marked in the rising sun, which seemed to ascend noticeably slower than usual into the blue heavens. The glaring white light of large snow-fields dazzled the eyes, and the water along the coast was as a deep blue and as clear as a solution of copper. Millions of minute crystals had formed during the night in the rigging of the Chemeia and now glittered brilliantly.

"Polar land!" Erik cried out lustily.

"Last evening, after sundown, we crossed the southern polar circle," the captain replied, nodding to Erik, "and now we are sailing to the day lasting half a year. The sun we can now see rising will, the nearer we approach south, appear gradually to remain still and only sink after five or six months."

Erik peered thoughtfully before him. Gradually, as the eyes became accustomed to the bright glare of the light, he noticed that the coast was surrounded by a belt of ice, miles in width, and that the sea was covered with countless icebergs.

"We must consider it a wonderful thing that we got as far as we did, without feeling the cold or noticing the icebergs," the captain continued; "we are now on the 67th degree latitude, and James Ross himself could not penetrate further than the 78th. Notwithstanding this it would be impossible, even with a ship as staunch as the *Chemeia*, to break through the ice belt surrounding the land over yonder, and with every hour of our progress southward the cold will become more intense."

"Then the navigable water here is much more difficult to pass through than that in the North Pole?" the young wife remarked inquiringly.

"Yes and no," the captain replied. "Around the North Pole the summer is comparatively warm and in the most favorable season any one can easily penetrate as far as the 80th degree of latitude and sometimes still further, but to offset this the winters there are extremely severe and rigorous, and a ship surprised in that region by the coldest season is generally lost with all on board. Here in the South polar region the temperature is about the same all the year round, therefore the winter does not present so many dangers—the drift ice is the greatest, but to reach as near the pole as up north is impossible, at least with a ship."

"Oh, look," the wife exclaimed; "there's a whale!"

Sure enough, far out a great dark mass could be discerned plainly cutting rapidly through the sea and now and then shooting forth mighty columns of water, like geysers, high up into the air.

"Where are the whalers?" Erik asked, turning to the captain.

"As a rule they never come much further south than we now are," was the reply, "but considering this unusually mild weather and the remarkable absence of drift ice, it is possible that some of them have penetrated to still more southerly latitudes. If, however, we want to communicate with any of them, in my opinion it would be best not to proceed much farther. Our second mate, Junker, knows the seas hereabouts better than I do, and I suggest that we get his opinion."

Consequently all the officers were called together in a ship's council. Junker, who had served his time aboard a whaler, was of the positive opinion that it would not be wise in any case to proceed farther south, and that if the ship cruised about in the vicinity, a whaler would, sooner or later, be met. This was also the opinion of the other officers, and the decision reached was, that the *Chemeia* for the time being should keep between the 66th and 67th degrees latitude, and that sharp watch was to be maintained day and night towards all points of the compass.

This was accordingly done. All day a man was posted in the bow with a telescope. Erik had completed his literary labors, and everything was ready for delivery. Days, however, passed monotonously and yet no whaler was discovered, although numberless whales could be seen sporting in lively fashion around the ship. Junker swore to himself in his own way, that it was very inexplicable that nothing appeared, and Erik began to grow restless and fretful again.

The nervous tension and impatience became greater with each day that passed. The entire crew took the deepest interest in the course affairs were taking; every one knew what was at stake. Once the uncertainty had been taken out of the objects of the cruise, it was a great pleasure to Erik to notice the excellent character of his men. They were all devoted to him body and soul, and there was not one who would not have risked his very life to attain the much sought object.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE PRECIOUS MESSAGE.

ONE day Erik sat in his cabin, morose and discouraged, and revising his manuscripts for the hundredth time. Suddenly loud cries startled him. He hastened up the companionway to inquire the cause of the hubbub.

Kelly stood at the starboard rail and roared out something, while the balance of the crew crowded around him.

In the hope that he would at last see a ship, Erik quickly turned his eyes, but in vain—the seas were as bare and void of anything in the shape of a sail as before.

"There! There!" Kelly cried.

"What? Where?" exclaimed Peter. "I don't see anything."

"Idiot you!" Kelly fairly screamed now, "don't you see the whale?"

At the same moment the entire crew broke forth in one loud cheer.

"A harpoon!"

It was true. Several hundred yards from the ship swam a huge whale—a harpoon stuck in his body.

"He's drifted from the south," the captain told them, "and provided he was not harpooned a long time ago we surely must meet the whaler if we run a few points in that direction. The navigable waters there are very much more limited than here, on account of the pack ice, so that he cannot escape us, if we keep our eyes open."

The Chemeia accordingly had her nose pointed towards the south, and early that afternoon the lookout reported a vessel in sight—news at which the entire crew clambered hastily on deck.

The captain, a young Southerner, tanned to a dark brown by tropical suns, appeared on the deck of his vessel, and to the question as to whether he was the owner he replied in the affirmative. He also agreed willingly to come aboard the Chemeia.

Erik received him in his cabin, in the presence of his wife, Captain Alsloev, and the two mates, and asked him, rather bluntly, whether he would sell the ship *Esperanza* and agree to undertake a certain mission.

The strange captain thoughtfully stroked his beard. He declared then that their luck in whaling had been unusually good that year, and unless the compensation was very liberal he could not think of a proposition which would put an end to his trip. Besides, his crew, to a man, had each his share in the proceeds and they would ask for indemnity.

Erik replied that the price was a matter of indifference to him. He would willingly pay twenty thousand pounds sterling for the ship and give each one of the crew several hundred pounds as indemnity.

The captain of the *Esperanza* looked at the speaker in surprise, not to say dismay. His eyes wandered over the entire cabin with its ceilings heavily decorated in pure gold, and at the priceless hand carvings of the woodwork.

"Twenty thousand pounds is a good price," he frankly confessed, "and I would not hesitate a moment to sell my ship, but I must have a talk with my people first of all, although I have no doubt but what they will be agreeable. Then, naturally, I wish to know what the mission is of which you spoke—for, I can easily imagine," and he smiled slyly, "that you are not paying such a price for nothing."

As Erik did not immediately reply, Captain Alsloev hastened to say:

"Our only object is to communicate with Europe, but it must be done with the greatest secrecy. The facts are these: We are now engaged in a cruise for scientific purposes, which for political reasons must remain a secret. It is our intention to proceed still further south, where all communication with the world will cease, and therefore it is of the greatest importance for us to have certain letters and private reports sent to Europe. You will most likely be spoken on your trip home by some man of war or other naval vessel, and asked whether you have seen anything of us; that, of course, you must deny. More than that we cannot say."

"I am perfectly well satisfied with your explanation," the American replied. "I will now return to my ship and in half an hour you shall have the decision."

He rose and retired from the cabin with a low bow.

Those remaining behind continued the discussion. Would it be wise to intrust the correspondence to a total stranger? Suppose he thoughtlessly spoke of the matter to some enemy?

"It would be better to send a reliable man along," Junker remarked, "and give him orders to carry the letters to their place of destination."

"Szemsky would be the right man," Smith suggested.

This proposition was generally approved. Szemsky, every one knew, could be trusted, and Junker was therefore at once sent after him.

"I am prepared to execute your orders, and I feel proud of your confidence in me," he said, when informed of what was desired of him.

Soon all arrangements were satisfactorily made. The crew of the *Esperanza* were very happy at earning such a large sum of money with so little labor, and Erik also was much pleased to feel that the matter was under the care of as trustworthy a man as Szemsky.

Several hours were occupied in making preparations for the trip. Szemsky was plentifully supplied with clothing of various kinds, so that he could use a

number of disguises. Mueller, an experienced shoemaker, assumed the task of sewing the letters inside a pair of long leather boots so that no one could find them. Szemsky was then presented with one hundred thousand pounds in Bank of England notes, all above expenses to be for himself.

The *Esperanza* set sail and took a northerly course, while Szemsky stood at the helmsman's side, waving a last greeting.

Captain Alsloev gave orders to fire three shots from the cannon as parting salutes; then the *Chemeia* also resumed her journey—in an opposite direction.

"Now for the south," Alsloev said to Erik, as they stood on the bridge.

"Yes, go as far as the pole if we can reach there," Erik replied. "Our only aim now is to attain a haven of security."

"Then we must be prepared to be frozen in and ice bound for six months or so," the captain said.

"So much the better. We will remain at the pole one year, and will then turn about to see how the world has changed in the mean time."

Rapidly the *Chemeia* shot through the waves. The distance between the two vessels was already so great that the *Esperanza* seemed only to be a speck on the distant horizon. Ice floes began to drift past the ship, which, however, easily cut its way through them with her sharp steel prow. In the distance, mountains of snow of high altitude glimmered and large icebergs glittered in the bright, blinding glare of the sunlight.

Calmly and joyfully the *Chemeia* sailed on towards the polar summer.

CHAPTER XIV.—AT THE END OF A YEAR.

"READY!" Kelly called out, and with Brown, Calandro, and Peter, hastened back to the ship. More than a nautical mile off, they had, with the aid of red hot iron bars, melted deep holes in the ice, which they filled with a mixture of powder and dynamite. In this manner the *Chemeia* had penetrated through the ice quite a stretch during the last few weeks towards the north.

Erik and his wife stood on the bridge looking toward the south, where one year of their lives had been passed in long needed, and therefore doubly welcome, rest and peace. The sun which had risen three months ago threw its bright rays over the immense, immeasurable ice fields which had again frozen solidly behind them, closing the path of water they had opened when they left the quiet, clear polar sea to return to the great, restless world which so irresistibly drew them back again.

"How do you think matters there are now?" Erik asked thoughtfully. "With each foot that we approach nearer the old world, I feel myself to be more and more restless. Has everything gone as was planned? Did Szemsky arrive safely and does the world know the great secret? I can find no peace until I ascertain the true facts."

"It is the same with me," his wife replied. "I cannot find sleep when I think that perhaps we must resume the old restless life. Oh, Erik, how happy we have been this last year! It was so peaceful and beautiful on the quiet islands, where the air was so pure and sweet. How grand it was in the

woods of dwarf trees when the *aurora australis* flashed in the skies and the sea lay before us, smooth as a mirror! Not one sound stirred the peace, not a bird sang; the rare polar fish and the dumb seals were the only living beings besides our party. At such times one is so seriously impressed—it carries one so far from all thoughts of strife. We shall never forget the country we ought never have left."

"You are right, but we *had* to leave. Remember we return with a second great discovery—that of the uninhabited islands of the polar regions, where never before human foot has touched. What else has fate ordained me for? I feel I am one of the few selected by it as men of destiny. Keep up your courage, dear wife; we must go onward, no matter by which circuitous route we reach our goal. We must never despair."

* * * * *

The open sea!

A hoarse shout of joy from the entire crew greeted the narrow strip of blue, shimmering far on the horizon. The ice now became so thin that the Chemeia could easily cut her way through with her sharp prow. A few days later they saw the sun sink for the first time since they had left civilized regions. The night, or rather the twilight, lasted only half an hour, but it was nevertheless proof that they were much farther north.

They intended to stop at Montevideo, to take in a new supply of coal and food. From South America they would proceed direct to Europe.

A few minutes south of the polar circle the first whaler appeared. The Chemeia sounded her whistle and lay to, while the crew waved their caps.

"Have you potatoes?" was Kelly's first question. He was an Irishman, and had missed these vegetables more than the others.

"What do you wish?" came back from the strange ship.

It was an Argentine vessel, and Calandro had to be called to act as interpreter.

"Have you potatoes?" he asked.

"Yes," they replied; "some."

"Ask them how much a bushel," Kelly suggested.

"How much a bushel?" Calandro called over.

"Ten pounds sterling."

"Great Scott!" Kelly exclaimed. "Are they insane?" "Ten pounds! Two hundred reichsmark!" Mueller mumbled. "Hundred and eighty kronen for a bushel of potatoes!" Peter said, and laughed loudly.

Erik now appeared and showed great excitement.

"Ask them whether that is the regular price now, and whether all other articles have risen as much."

Calandro obeyed.

Ten pounds sterling was very cheap, they said, and that was the only thing poor people could afford; everything was much dearer. The world had become so flooded with money during the last year that its value had sunk to zero. Gold had no worth, while real estate, on the other hand, had bounded to enormous heights. All, all was due to the cursed Englishmen who were sending a perfect deluge of gold into the world. No one could sur-

mise how it was done. The English navy was the largest in the world, larger than those of all other nations combined, and they did as they pleased—no other country dared oppose them. Russia had lost nearly all her Asiatic possessions to England, and Germany its African colonies. China had been conquered and was an English province, and it was expected that the same fate would soon meet every other country on the globe.

Erik turned ghastly white. The news stunned him.

"One more question," he tremblingly said. "Ask them where England got all the gold."

"Who knows?" the Argentinian replied. "There is no Parliament now. The English government takes the money out of the clouds, without taxes or budgets. They say they make their own gold. This is probably only talk. Others say they discovered a hill of solid gold in the heart of Africa, higher than Chimborazo, and that, very likely, is also a fake. Do you want potatoes or not?"

Erik purchased several bushels, and the sun was near the sea's edge when the ships parted. Far on the horizon a dark, oblong mass appeared and approached with great rapidity; it was too symmetrical and sharp edged for a cloud bank, while it seemed too enormous to be a vessel.

"What in the mischief is that in the northwest?" Captain Alsloev exclaimed.

The entire crew echoed his cry.

"Ask the whaler, before he gets too far off—hurry!" Kelly called out to Calandro.

He formed a trumpet with his hands and called the question over to the South American, which had gained quite some headway.

"An English man o' war," the reply came back.

Consternation and fear spread over the features of all on board when Calandro had translated the reply.

"Then our friend, the Englishman, has grown wonderfully, since we shot him in the eye," Kelly remarked.

Erik and the captain whispered together hurriedly, while the men looked towards the vessel with frowning faces.

The sun sank and the darkness became denser. The Chemeia changed her course and attempted to escape towards the east. But suddenly the black monster also changed her course and steamed in the same direction. It appeared to be under full steam and approached almost faster than a hurricane, and yet there was no smoke visible.

"They use electricity," Alsloev whispered to Erik.

"Yes, I see," Erik replied, with compressed lips.

Suddenly the water on the starboard side of the Chemeia began churning ominously. A queer object like a double cylinder came up to the ship with incredible speed. It was about twenty yards long and one third as broad. Slowly it bobbed up and down, still approaching, gently touched the side of the ship, and then ran with such force against the platinized steel plates of the bow that it seemed as if the ship was to be destroyed. The crew uttered a cry of terror.

From this moment on the Chemeia obeyed neither rudder nor propeller. As though she were glued to the double cylinder, she was irresistibly drawn towards the English man o' war, which now directed a blinding electric searchlight on the doomed ship.

"They have captured us with an electro magnet!" Alsloev exclaimed. "We are lost!"

Erik said nothing. He stared defiantly at the colossus, the railing of which seemed to be as high over the surface of the water as the top of a church steeple.

When they reached the side of the monster ship a windlass creaked, and an officer who had descended ordered every one, without exception, to appear on board of the war vessel.

Silently all obeyed, stepping on the platform sullenly in groups of four.

When they had reached the deck a small man, clad in a gorgeous uniform, approached and asked, "Who is the owner of that vessel?"

Erik stepped forward.

"Is your name Poulsen?"

"Yes, my name is Erik Poulsen," he replied, and looked at the officer scornfully.

"In the name of his majesty the Emperor of England, I declare you my prisoner!"

CHAPTER XV.—ENGLAND'S "INSANE" PRISONERS.

"WHERE have you placed the new patient?" asked Dr. Richardson, the chief physician of the State Insane Asylum.

"In No. 5, doctor," replied the orderly.

"That will not do," the chief rejoined. "He is a very dangerous patient, whom you must not lose sight of for one moment, and in no case allow him to come in contact with the other patients. You must take him to No. 13 and guard him carefully when he walks in the courtyard or I shall hold you strictly accountable."

"Very well, chief; No. 13 then," the orderly said, and vanished.

"Out here!" he called to Erik. "Here!"

Erik rose and measured the man with a look of utter scorn and disdain.

"Do you really believe I am insane?" he asked. "If you do you are awfully mistaken," he added, when no reply came.

"They all say that," the orderly growled. "No more dillydallying now. Out—I say!"

He pushed Erik before him towards the stairs until they reached the upper floor. There he shoved Erik into a cell and locked the door.

Erik found himself alone in a small room with padded walls and a bench having rounded corners. There was a small window, placed high up on the wall and secured with strong iron bars, and the breaking of the surf on the rocks told Erik that he was in a cell facing the ocean.

With a deep sigh he sat on the bench and rested his head in his hands.

This, then, was the end of it all! The threat which the President of the French republic had hinted was realized.

While he was incarcerated here—of course for life—or until he was old and gray and perhaps really crazy, a nation profited by his discovery and subjugated all other nations; in fact, placed the entire world under it as vassals. That was enough to set him crazy. Had the discovery only remained his property—his very own—then he could still have hoped. But now?

Slowly he rose and began pacing up and down his cell, like an imprisoned lion. He raised himself on tiptoe and tried to get a glimpse of the sea, but it was futile. Only a small piece of the westerly sky, reddened by the sinking sun, could be seen, and he sank back discouraged on the bench once more.

"He is a monomaniac and imagines he can make gold," the orderly explained to some one in the hall.

A short time afterwards, the second physician, a young man whose frank, friendly face would inspire confidence in any one, entered the cell, felt Erik's pulse and examined him critically.

"Do you really believe me insane?" Erik inquired earnestly as he looked the doctor squarely in the eye.

"Not a bit of it!" the latter replied. "You are only a little nervous and excited. You need proper treatment—a few shower baths; then you'll be all right again."

"I have been confined here because I claimed I could make gold," Erik ventured, to test the physician. "How now, if it were really true that I *had* made this discovery? As a physician you surely must have sufficient knowledge of chemistry not to deny the *possibility* of such a discovery?"

"I must confess that my knowledge of chemistry is limited to pharmacology, and therefore I cannot form an opinion. Keep yourself very quiet for a while, try to get some sleep; read a little. I brought you a few illustrated newspapers to look through and pass time pleasantly. I will see you again tomorrow. Until then, good by."

Before Erik could say any more the door had closed on the doctor. That visit appeared to him like a ray of light in Stygian darkness. The physician seemed to be honest, and surely would not deny it if he knew Erik was *not* insane. Shower baths! The doctor certainly meant that. Erik determined to test him further at his next visit.

Time passed slowly. Twice each day Erik was led forth into an open courtyard for exercise under the watchful eye of a keeper. The shower bath followed, and then confinement in his cell. The young doctor saw him daily for a week and the little chats with his patient grew more interesting and longer, until finally Erik was gladdened by noticing that the physician seemed to be worried and nonplussed as to what to think of his mental condition.

One day he intimated that he would ask the chief physician to grant Erik the freedom of the prison corridors and rooms. The next day and day after, however, he did not appear. The fourth day the chief physician appeared

and glanced casually at Erik. That was the last medical visit, and thereafter only the keeper came into contact with him.

Months passed ; autumn, winter, and spring followed each other and Erik fell into a condition of mental apathy from sheer monotony. Thinking was of no benefit, he found ; his fate was sealed apparently ; he was buried alive.

What had become of the others—of his wife ? Where was she ? Where was his faithful crew ? Were they free or—— ? He dared not think further.

At first he harbored thoughts of escape, but the massive granite walls and solid iron bars at the windows, the sea rushing against the side of the asylum, and the lynx eyed guard—all this destroyed his hopes. One refuge remained for him—he dwelt in the land of his imagination—where in his youth he had spent many hours in happy dreams of ambition ; there he found freedom from his excruciating, horrible thoughts over the reality.

All day he heard distant screaming, shouting, and laughing emanating from the other cells ; it made him shudder. He never saw the other inmates except perhaps through a grated window or door. Very rarely he met a keeper returning with some lunatic from his exercise.

This rare occurrence happened again one day, early in June. On going out, Erik met a keeper followed by a prisoner in the asylum garb, who held his head low. Erik could not see his features until one step away, and then the man suddenly raised his head—their eyes met and both trembled violently under the unexpected shock of recognition.

It was Szemsky !

Their first involuntary impulse was to call loudly to each other, but thanks to their presence of mind neither betrayed the other. As they passed Szemsky surreptitiously made a sign with his index finger, indicating a question. Erik, whose nerves quivered with the intense strain and the terrible import of that moment, so fraught with meaning for both, understood Szemsky's meaning, and behind the keeper's back made a motion as though writing in the air the number " 13."

Had Szemsky seen and understood ?

When Erik reached his cell he sank on his couch and lay in awful suspense, deeply in thought.

What result would come from the recognition between Szemsky and himself ? Would it open the way to freedom ? Probably not. Perhaps Szemsky was not so closely confined and guarded as Erik, and yet—the hopes that seemed newly born in his breast soon died again.

Where was Szemsky ? Perhaps in another wing of the building. Of what benefit would it be for him to know the number of Erik's cell ? The more he thought of the matter, the more he became convinced that his position was not one whit the better.

He paced his cell restlessly once more, now and then casting a sad glance at the high, grated window. Outside the foam crested breakers sang their eternal song of the sea—of life—of freedom ; inside the cell, life imprisonment—a living death !

See! What was that at the window? A bird? No, only a small piece of white paper, carried there by the wind and clinging to the iron bars. Such a small incident was an event in Erik's life. Strange how it clung there! Soon it would blow away again.

Erik looked at it closer. It did not appear as though it would leave the window; it seemed to rise a short distance, fly outward, and then return to the same place! How strange! Erik stepped close to discover the cause.

Good heavens! What was it? The paper was suspended by a thread. *No one but Szemsky could have done that!*

Erik tried desperately to secure the paper. Impossible! He could just touch the iron bars with his finger tips. He could not reach out. What was to be done? The blood throbbed and hammered in his temples; he looked around the cell in agony to find something to stand on. The bench was fastened securely to the wall.

Suddenly an idea flashed through his mind. He slipped softly to the cell door to see whether he was observed and looked through the wicket. No one was in the corridor. Erik took off his clothing, rapidly formed a cushion on the floor near the window, and stood thereon. Once—twice—he reached and failed—the wind sent the paper fluttering from his eager grasp; but at last he had it. He untied it and fastened the end of the thread to the grating ready for his reply. He dressed hastily and devoured the precious message with his eyes:

"Treachery! Petterson captured by the British. Letters taken from me. Am employed as assistant in the medicine shop. Answer—quick!"

Reply! How could he do so? He had nothing with which to write. Szemsky must furnish him material with this. But how was he to send the first message?

A story of a prisoner who allowed the nail on his index finger to grow and then cut it into the shape of a pen came to Erik's mind. And ink? Blood would do for that. He now had a better idea. Rapidly he bit off a sharp piece of one of his finger nails, and in the paper sent by Szemsky punctured holes enough to form the words "Send me pencil and paper."

He again quickly disrobed, formed a cushion of his clothing as before, and then standing thereon, fastened the paper to the thread.

Erik tried to sleep, but could not from excitement. He slumbered uneasily for but a few moments at a time, and in his feverish dreams the little message, suspended in the air, played pranks on him. Shortly before dawn he sank into a restless sleep.

Bright daylight permeated every corner of the cell when Erik awoke. He looked towards the window: the paper was gone and in its place hung a small packet. In a moment he had drawn it into the cell and opened it. A short piece of pencil, a few strips of paper, and this message were inside:

"Could not reply before. Had to attend to press in medicine room; people are watching me; I can walk alone in the corridors; not outside. Tried to reach your door; could not. Guard is there. Flight impossible. Cliffs all around us. Only exit through the large gateway, which is always guarded. Sz."

Erik was obliged to wait with his reply, as the keeper was liable to appear at any moment. He hid his supply of paper between the floor and wall padding, where it was safe from discovery. While exercising later in the courtyard, he looked for Szemsky, but could not see him. Perhaps he avoided meeting him intentionally for fear of betrayal and thus destroying their slender chances of escape.

Erik found opportunity after breakfast to reply to Szemsky's note and immediately sent the letter up by the thread. Half an hour later a new message dangled before the cell window, and this was repeated several times.

The subject of the letters was principally the location of the various divisions of the institution, the habits of those within it, and like matters, with a view to assisting in their escape. Szemsky maintained that the only means of exit was by the large gateway, as from there only a road led down to the shore, while everywhere else jagged rocks and cliffs rose almost perpendicularly from the sea. Besides, all the windows faced the sea, and were so small that an ordinary man could not squeeze through even were there no bars. Over the large doorway the storeroom was located, in the floor of which was a trap door, through which the supplies for the asylum were hoisted by means of a crane. Szemsky knew that this trap door was unlocked and never bolted. It would be easily opened. Their descent was possible by means of a rope and tackle. Then the worst difficulty of all had to be faced—the large gateway.

This was always kept carefully closed by means of a strong combination lock. To overpower the guard would be an easy matter, but the combination? Their only hope lay in forcing the guard to disclose it or to open the gate himself. If they failed in their first attempt at escape all hope must be abandoned forever.

Szemsky spoke of several men who had made efforts to gain their liberty and were afterwards captured and walled in in their cells alive to starve. Therefore to flee was taking their lives in their hands. Even should they reach the outside of the prison successfully, how were they to leave the island? They must take their chances and rely on the help of Providence.

Szemsky had no difficulty in leaving his cell. He stood well with the keepers, who considered him a harmless case, and he was therefore permitted to assist them in their work. His cell door was only bolted at night from the outside and that bolt he could easily throw back by means of a long nail which he had hidden in his cell without the knowledge of the keepers. But Erik—how was he to get out? His cell was not only bolted, but locked as well. Only one chance remained. Szemsky must take the keys from the guard in the corridor where Erik's cell was located on the night when the escape was attempted.

Erik had formed a plan of his own to further the matter. He had noticed that the keeper who was placed on duty Friday evenings was very fond of beer, and that every time Erik left part of his beer, given him each day for supper, the keeper promptly drained the mug to the bottom. If Szemsky could smuggle down a small quantity of morphine, or, better yet, chloral, from the medicine room, then the worst difficulty was overcome.

On a Thursday, early in July, when the exchange of letters had been carried on about one month, Erik sent the following message to Szemsky :

"Friday night, 1 A. M. Send me a few grains of chloral hydrate, and, if possible, a vial of chloroform. Courage, friend ! Provide yourself also with chloroform."

CHAPTER XVI.—THE EXPLOSION.

FRIDAY evening ! Erik ate his supper, closely observed by his keeper, who glanced with longing eyes at the beer mug.

Would he never go ? Yes, at last he stepped outside a few moments.

Quick as lightning, Erik drew forth from its hiding place behind the wall padding a small paper package, and from it dropped several grains of a colorless crystal into his mug, where they immediately dissolved.

"Good !" he thought. "Glad I got chloral ; he will never taste nor smell that. Morphine would have tickled his nostrils."

A moment later the keeper returned. His eyes brightened with joy when he noticed that the mug was still half full of beer. He immediately placed it to his lips and drained it off at one draught. He tottered out of the cell with the plate and the mug in his hand, locking the cell door behind him. Erik ran to the little wicket, and saw him stagger, fumble around in the air with the hand in which he held the mug and plate, then suddenly make tracks for a settee in a window niche on the opposite side of the corridor ; where his head fell over on his arms, and he lay in helpless stupor.

Erik remained there with eyes riveted to the opening, listening and watching. Suppose some one came and discovered the sleeping keeper ? At each sound he shrank together. No one appeared, however, and the chloral did its work undisturbed.

"Less than the maximum dose he certainly did not get," Erik mumbled to himself. "I only hope he will not snore too loud."

The clock in the tower struck twelve. The half hour struck, then one in the morning. But not a sound in the corridor—what was that ? Did the clock strike again ? Half past one ! And no Szemsky ! Nothing—not a suspicion of an approaching step—it was awful ! Finally and Szemsky at last !

A subdued exclamation and a hearty handshake followed, and Szemsky, by a sign, commanded silence.

Noiselessly, like Indians on the warpath, both now crept in their stocking feet along the corridor, up the steps near by, to the next floor, where was located the storeroom. Pst ! A guard walks with heavy step—a strong, broad shouldered giant. Will their plan succeed ?

Szemsky motioned silently to Erik to remain standing where he was ; then took a sponge from his pocket, uncorked a small vial and a sweet pungent odor permeated the atmosphere.

Szemsky saturated the sponge and watched the guard for a favorable moment for attack. He approached them and then turned around without having noticed them. He came and turned again—now !—his back was towards them.

With one wild leap Szemsky sprang on him. A short, sharp struggle followed, then feeble resistance and faint moaning—the chloroform had done its work. The keeper tried faintly to tear the sponge from his nose—it seemed for a moment as though he would succeed, but suddenly, strong giant though he was, he sank back helpless. Szemsky caught him and carefully laid him at full length on the dark side of the corridor floor. He pressed the sponge over the fellow's nose and signaled to Erik to proceed.

Suddenly both were startled by a sound. The keeper whom Erik had stupefied began singing a lively, ribald song, from the London streets. Louder and louder his voice rose on the still night air, awakening the crazy inmates one by one. Very soon he was accompanied by a chorus of crazy voices until pandemonium reigned. Erik was the first to regain his courage, and explained in a whisper to Szemsky that it was not unusual for people in such a stupor to begin singing.

The stupefied keeper sang louder and louder each moment. From one tune he went to another, until it seemed as though the full program of a low class music hall was to be rendered.

At last! They had reached the storeroom. Once inside, Erik bolted the door, which luckily they had found open.

Day began dawning, and they could indistinctly see objects about them. There, before them, was the trap door. Szemsky lifted the cover with all his strength. Thank God! It was not bolted. Time was precious. The drunken keeper and his chorus of lunatics still howled madly and must soon attract the night guard. Szemsky was the first to descend into the well or dark opening. Erik was just about following him, when Szemsky clambered back hastily, all out of breath, and panted excitedly:

"Back! The keeper of the gateway is not there! We cannot open the door ourselves; we must get back to our cells quickly, before we are discovered! They must not know that we ever left."

In desperation both sat there pondering over a means of escape. Szemsky stared before him vacantly in mute despair. Soon their captors would be upon them and then—they would be walled in alive!

Erik looked about him, dazed and bewildered. What was to be done? Helplessly he glanced at the objects around him—nothing but sacks, cases, carboys of acid for the drug department and several iron cylinders containing fluid carbonic acid.

Absent minded he gazed at the labels on the various casks and bales, when suddenly he sprang to his feet.

"Szemsky!" he cried, roughly shaking his comrade by the shoulder, "I have it!—we will burst the gate open with a blast!"

"Burst? Blast?" Szemsky repeated mechanically.

"Yes!—Quick!" Erik now commanded. "Here—glycerin—there—is a carboy of nitric acid; we will make enough nitroglycerin to blow in the whole place!"

"Nitroglycerin!" Szemsky ejaculated, and shuddered.

"Empty this jar on the floor!" Erik continued nervously. "It is only distilled water. Here is nitric acid and there glycerin and phosphoric acid.

Fill the jar half full, but be careful; it means life or death. Pour in only a small quantity at a time and watch it; the acid must cool before we pour on the glycerin. Roll one of those carbonic acid cylinders over here!"

In a few moments a dangerous quantity of nitroglycerin was prepared, and Erik looked around him for a suitable receptacle. His eyes fell on one of the cast iron jugs used for shipping quicksilver. It was empty, and hastily, though carefully, the thickly flowing nitroglycerin mixture was poured in.

"Now," Erik directed, "we must freeze the stuff, otherwise it will not explode when we drop it. That will not take much time—the fluid carbonic acid will congeal the nitroglycerin in a few seconds."

Quickly he opened the faucet of the carbonic acid cylinder and immediately the chalky white carbonic acid flowed over the iron jug containing the nitroglycerin, where it formed a flaky, snow-like substance.

"Good!" Erik chuckled. "Now to fasten the bomb to the block and tackle and then—to drop it down below. Stop! Not yet; we will also be blown to atoms. We must attach a long rope so we can go to some distance. When we are at the other end of the corridor we will raise and then drop it."

Szemsy found a long, sound rope, strong enough to draw up the heavy iron bomb without breaking. This was run through the pulley, one end fastened to the charge of nitroglycerin, and with the other end in Szemsy's hand, both quickly left the storeroom and hastened towards the end of the corridor, playing out the rope as they went.

The keeper still sang his maudlin song. A quarter—perhaps half an hour had elapsed since he was drugged—but what did Erik and his comrade care about time now? They had reached the center of the long corridor and the end of the rope Szemsy held, both at the same time, when Szemsy pointed ahead of him, ghastly pale. Ten men of the night guard approached, attracted by the noisy singing of the unconscious keeper and his crazy chorus. They immediately espied the fugitives and made a concerted rush at them.

"Lost!" Szemsy groaned and tottered back, his hands pressing his feverish temples.

"Let go the rope!" Erik roared, and unconsciously Szemsy obeyed.

That instant a blinding flash of fire poured into every window facing that side and turned the growing dusk into a frightful glare. An awful, deafening crash followed simultaneously, and the terrible shock threw both fugitives violently to the ground. The massive building shook and tottered—the ceilings fell with a deafening roar, and a blinding white dust almost suffocated every living being in the doomed place.

In every corner the huge structure quaked and trembled; the floors rocked like the deck of a vessel at sea—in a storm. The cell doors, barred and locked, were all burst open, and in a stream the mad prisoners rushed out. Another crash—another shock—and a perfect rain of falling masonry followed. Hark! The drunken keeper still sings his weird song undisturbed.

Both fugitives sank down, unconscious.

Otto M. Moeller.

(TO BE CONCLUDED.)

THE RIVER OF DARKNESS.*

A record of some marvelous experiences in the Dark Continent—Why a water journey beneath the earth's surface was undertaken at frightful risks—A voyage on a raft along an unknown course and without the possibility of retreat.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

GUY CHUTNEY, an officer in the British army, on his way back to service in India, is asked to stop off at Aden and take important despatches to Sir Arthur Ashby, governor of Zaila, on the African coast. En route the steamer touches at Berbera, where the great annual fair is being held. Here Chutney rescues from death Makar Makalo, by shooting a leopard whose slumbers the Arab had unwittingly disturbed, and a few minutes later he meets an old friend, Melton Forbes, foreign correspondent of an English newspaper. Suspecting that there is treachery in the wind, Forbes sends his native servant Momba through the town to investigate, who soon after returns pursued by a mob of Somali warriors. It appears that Manuel Torres, a Portuguese fellow passenger of Guy on the Aden steamer, and whom he suspects of reading his despatches, has brought rifles to Makar Makalo, who is instituting rebellion against the English on behalf of Rao Khan, Emir of Harar.

Melton, with his servant, accompanies Guy to Zaila, and at the residency they find Sir Arthur drinking champagne with Colonel Carrington. Their report carries consternation to the breast of the governor, who thinks of seeking safety on board the steamer. But it is too late; the Arabs are already swarming about the place, the Englishmen are all made prisoners, and doomed by Makar Makalo to be sent as slaves to the Somalis of the Galla country. During the journey the prisoners are separated through Makalo's agency, Guy and Melton being carried by the Arabs to Rao Khan. But the people of Harar, in their hatred of the English, demand that they be executed at once, and the Emir is forced to promise that they shall be sent to the block in four days' time. Meantime they are waited upon in their cell (Melton having been wounded) by Canaris, a Greek, who has been a favored captive of the Emir for two years. He shows them a document given him by an aged Englishman, who had died in the prison, and which tells of an underground river in the neighborhood which promises them all escape if they might only procure the money with which to make a few preparations. Guy has some in a belt which has been fortunately overlooked, and on an appointed night they overpower the guards and start.

They finally reach the entrance to the underground river—guided to it by a fleeing Galla who makes his escape thereby from a party of Abyssinians. But their provisions have been exhausted and they know not what to do until, in one of their night exploring trips, they capture two stray camels, which inspire Chutney with an idea which may mean the rescue of their friends from the Gallas, near whose camp they now know themselves to be. Staining their faces to make themselves pass as Portuguese, he and Canaris ride in among the Gallas, declare that they have been sent from Zaila by Makar Makalo, who is hard pressed by the British, and that the latter will only withdraw on condition that the governor of the town and his friends, who have been sold into slavery, be delivered up to these messengers, with provisions enough to last them on the return journey to Zaila. The matter is still under consideration when Oko Sam suddenly appears upon the scene.

CHAPTER XX.—BY A HAIR'S BREADTH.

A NERVOUS shiver passed through Guy as he recognized the repulsive face of his old enemy, and instinctively he pulled his burnous closer around his head. Oko Sam darted a curious glance at the two motionless

* This story began in the May issue of THE ARGOSY. The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.

figures on the camels and then advanced to meet the head man, who broke off the conference and greeted his newly arrived chief in a most servile manner.

"Don't despair," whispered Guy; "those infernal Abyssinians have become drunk, and allowed their captive to slip away just at this critical time, but all may go well yet."

It took but a short time to make Oko Sam acquainted with the facts of the case. He strode up to the camels, and gazed long and haughtily at the two strangers. Then, apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, he addressed a few words to the wizened Arab, and, turning to his people, jabbered away volubly for two or three minutes. When he ceased, half a dozen men started off in different directions, and the interpreter proceeded to communicate the decision to Guy, who, in spite of his calm bearing, was greatly agitated.

"Okó Sam say yes," began the Arab. "He friend of Makar Makalo; he no want Makar lose Zaila; he give plenty food for journey; he give six, ten, twenty men go long, so bring back much gift from Makar. You say Makar give much, hey?"

"Yes," replied Guy, repressing with difficulty his extreme joy, "Makar will give big rewards to Okó Sam."

The Arab turned aside with a grunt of satisfaction as half a dozen natives came up, bearing leathern sacks of provisions, which were handed up, one at a time, to Guy and Canaris, and slung across the necks of their camels.

This proceeding was barely over, when, to Guy's amazement and disgust, a band of Gallas, fully armed, and bearing each a supply of food strapped on their backs, advanced into the open space.

This was Okó Sam's promised escort. Instead of two men there were twenty.

"These good fellows here go long," said the Arab. "They no have camels; they go on foot one day's journey, then reach other tribe, where find plenty camel."

This statement relieved Guy considerably. It would not be so difficult, after all, to get rid of the troublesome escort if they were on foot.

And now came the crisis. At a signal from Okó Sam the guards about the hut flung open the entrance, and in a moment two emaciated, half starved figures were led forth, whom it was actually difficult to recognize as the pompous Sir Arthur Ashby and brave Colonel Carrington.

They still wore their uniforms, but the cloth hung in folds about their shrunken limbs, and their faces were pitifully thin and distressed.

Guy's heart beat fast with indignation as he gazed on this melancholy sight, and then he purposely half turned his face away, lest the prisoners should recognize him and unconsciously cause the failure of the whole plan.

The people drew back as the little group reached the camels. The two Englishmen were lifted up behind the supposed Portuguese—Sir Arthur with Canaris, the colonel beside Chutney—and so weak and helpless were they that it was necessary to partially strap them in their places.

All was now ready. Guy and Canaris were prepared to start, the prisoners were in their possession, and the armed escort were exchanging farewells with their comrades.

At this supreme moment, when the fullest success seemed assured, a startling diversion occurred.

A big Arab, a new arrival evidently, pushed his way forward, and as his glance fell on the Greek he started with surprise, and exclaimed aloud, "Canaris!"

With wonderful self possession the Greek looked at him in mute ignorance; but the Arab, who had probably but just come from Harar, pressed forward, and, joining Oko Sam a few paces away, began to talk excitedly in a low voice.

"We are lost, Chutney," whispered Canaris in tones of despair.

At the mention of this name, Guy felt the colonel's arms clasp his waist in a convulsive thrill.

"Not a sound, Colonel Carrington," he muttered under his breath, "as you value your freedom."

The tightened grasp instantly relaxed, and Guy turned his head slightly to obtain a clearer view of Oko Sam.

This action hastened the climax, for his burnous caught on the button of Colonel Carrington's coat and fell to the ground. A glaring torch passing at the moment completed the catastrophe, and the keen eyed Galla chief uttered a howl of rage and amazement as he recognized his old enemy of the market place at Berbera.

Never did Captain Chutney's quick wits do him a better service than at that moment.

In one glance he took in the whole situation, the astounded chief and his counselors, the swarthy mass of savages ready for instant action, the armed escort that stood between him and the edge of the encampment.

More speedily than words can tell it, his determination was reached. With a warning cry to Canaris, a hasty injunction to Colonel Carrington to hold fast, he snatched a short dagger from his waist and plunged it an inch or more into the flank of the Greek's camel, and then into that of his own animal.

The frightened and agonized beasts pranced madly for a second or two and then plunged desperately forward, trampling the amazed guards right and left.

It was over in a moment; a howl from the infuriated chief, a terrific uproar from the vast throng, and then, spurred to greater efforts by the tumult in their ears, the valiant camels thundered out into the desert, heedless of the scattered rifle fire, the volley of whizzing spears. With tremendous strides they bore their precious burdens toward safety and freedom, while the silence of the African night was rent by the venomous cries of their bloodthirsty pursuers.

For the moment they were safe, but in that long four mile race that lay ahead many perils might be encountered, and it was even within the realm of possibilities that the fleet footed Gallas would overtake the heavily burdened camels.

It was no time for conversation or explanation. A fervent "Thank God!" burst from Colonel Carrington's lips as he realized that he had fallen

into the hands of friends, while Sir Arthur, feebly beginning to comprehend what had happened, ejaculated several times, "Bless my soul," as he clung with might and main to the Greek's waist.

Faster and faster they sped over the plain until the tumult behind them was lost in the muffled tramp of the camels' hoofs. They rode side by side, with arms ready for instant use, but no foe appeared in front or behind, and at last, with a glad cry, Canaris pointed to the distant gleam of the Abyssinian camp.

"We are safe now," exclaimed Guy. "The Gallas feared to pursue us any further lest their anticipated attack on the Abyssinians should be spoiled."

"Yes," replied Canaris, "either that or they have circled round, hoping to cut us off at yonder gap in the mountains where the road breaks through to the coast. And now the rock must be close by. Ha! What does that mean?"

Bang! went a rifle shot directly ahead, and a brief red flash pierced the gloom.

"It is Forbes!" cried Chutney. "He is in danger. Quick, quick, to the rescue."

A loud shout followed closely on the heels of the report, and recognizing Melton's voice, Guy, lost to all sense of prudence, cried aloud:

"Don't give in, Forbes; we are coming."

An answering hail came distinctly back, followed immediately by a second shot.

The agony of suspense was brief. A moment later the rock loomed into view, and the panting camels came to a halt before the entrance to the cavern.

"Oh, you've come back safe?" exclaimed Melton coolly, as he came forward with a smoking rifle in his hand. "I've had a brush with a party of Abyssinians. They were hunting their camels, I suppose, and took me by surprise. I dropped one of the rascals, and—— Look out! There they are again."

All dodged to the ground as a shower of spears fell about the rock. With a hollow groan one of the camels dropped heavily over, pierced in the throat by a short spear, and his huge bulk formed a natural barrier before the cavern. Melton's rifle cracked sharply, and a howl of pain attested the accuracy of his aim.

"Into the cavern, all of you," cried Guy. "The Abyssinians are coming in force; the firing has attracted them to the spot."

Already a shadowy mass was visible some thirty yards off, and the sound of voices was distinctly heard.

The Greek hastily motioned Sir Arthur and the colonel into the cavern, and hurriedly tossed in the provisions bag by bag.

The enemy were now quite close, and as Canaris stowed away the last bag they came on with a wild rush.

From behind the dead camel Guy and Melton poured in a hot fire that checked their impetuous advance instantly, and before they could rally for

another charge, both had bolted into the gloomy hole, and the stone was deftly rolled into place.

CHAPTER XXI.—CUT OFF FROM THE OUTER EARTH.

THE lamp was lit instantly, and without a moment's delay Guy led the party at full speed down the corridor until the descent was reached.

"Now hurry down, all of you," he cried. "You have a flask of powder about you, Canaris. Give it to me."

"What are you going to do, Chutney?" asked Melton in alarm.

"Put an end to all pursuit," was the stern reply; and, seizing the flask, he placed it on the ground, and pouring a little powder on a strip of linen torn from the lining of his blouse, he deftly rolled a fuse and inserted one end in the mouth of the flask.

His intentions were apparent. The roof and walls of the passage were of loose earth and stone. A blast would bring down an avalanche.

Canaris attempted to expostulate, but Guy drove them all down the slope and applied a match to the fuse.

It was high time, for up the passage shone the gleam of torches. The enemy had effected an entrance.

Guy joined his companions on the shore of the river, and almost instantly a terrific explosion took place. It seemed to rend the earth. A tremendous crash and rumbling noise followed, and then all was quiet.

The concussion put out the lamp, but as soon as it was lighted again Guy ran up to see the result of his attempt.

No trace of the passageway existed. In its place was a grim wall of earth.

The full significance of what he had done now flashed into Guy's mind, and he gazed blankly into the faces of his comrades.

"We are buried alive," said Melton bitterly. "We are as dead to the world as though we were in our coffins."

"We have simply burned our ships behind us, that is all," replied Chutney. "Now for the river and freedom."

They went back and sat down beside the swiftly flowing water.

"Bless me if I know whether I am on my head or my feet," said Sir Arthur. "What on earth does this mean?"

"It means that these brave fellows have saved us from a fate worse than death," cried the colonel; "that is all I care to know at present."

"I will explain all," said Guy.

He straightway related everything that had happened from the time they were separated on the way to Harar to the discovery of the underground river and the daring plan for the rescue of the prisoners.

The colonel could scarcely repress his astonishment as he listened to the wonderful story, and at its conclusion he embraced his rescuer warmly.

"We owe you our lives," he said fervently. "Never was a braver deed attempted, never was a rescue more marvelously carried out. Ah, I can never repay the debt. A grateful country shall reward you, Captain Chutney. England shall know of your heroism."

"Yes, you are right, colonel," put in Sir Arthur, with a touch of his old pomposity; "the government shall know how its representative was delivered from the hands of these impious fiends. But bless me, I don't see that we are so much better off, after all. How are we going to get out of this beastly hole?"

"And what has become of Momba, and Captain Waller, and the Hindoos?" exclaimed Forbes, who had suddenly recollected the missing members of the party.

"Lost—all lost," replied the colonel sadly. "They were sold to a distant tribe in the interior two days after we arrived at the village. You see our condition. They have made us work from sunrise to sunset. We fell ill, and, being of use no longer, they deliberately tried to starve us to death. It was horrible, horrible!"

"It was a diabolical outrage," interrupted Sir Arthur. "The whole civilized world will shudder when it knows that the governor of Zaila was fed on tainted meat and spoilt rice, and very little of that, too. If England fails to resent this outrage, I'll cast off my allegiance to the crown, sir, and become a citizen of some other country. I will, by Jove!"

Sir Arthur might have gone on indefinitely with the tale of his grievances, but Guy cut it short by calling general attention to their present grave situation.

The supply of provisions was at once overhauled, and the inspection proved very satisfactory.

Six large bags had been loaded on the camels. Two of these held jerked beef, probably buffalo or deer meat, one contained rice, another a peculiar kind of hard cakes, made from native corn, and the remaining two were filled to the top with dates and figs.

"We are assured of food for some time to come," said Guy; "that is one consolation. I wish I could feel as certain of light. We have two lamps, and to supply these two big flasks of palm oil, not nearly enough, however, to last us on a long journey. When that is gone, I don't know what we shall do."

"When we stop for rest we shall have to do without light," suggested Melton. "If we find any places to stop," he added.

"It's beastly chilly in here," observed Sir Arthur, with a shiver. "Two days in a hole like this will give us all the rheumatism."

"Ah," said Canaris, "but I have provided for that. See, here are the trappings from the camels which were brought along in with us." And he held up one by one half a dozen richly embroidered rugs and skins, which had belonged to the leaders of the Abyssinians.

This pleasing discovery put them all in better spirits, and it was presently supplemented by another, which went far to remove the most formidable obstacle to their journey, for while the canoes were being examined Guy found in a far corner of the cavern a great pile of torches, made from some highly resinous wood. These had evidently belonged to the natives who formerly dwelt here, and were used by them instead of lamps on their journeys to the coast. They were fifty or sixty in number.

"This is a fortunate discovery," said Guy. "With these and the lamps we may have sufficient light to last out our trip."

"Yes; that removes the last obstacle," rejoined Forbes; "and now I propose that we take some refreshment. We have eaten nothing for nearly two days."

This was true. The excitement had almost banished hunger from their thoughts, but Melton's words roused their dormant appetites, and, sitting down beside the canoes, they made a hearty meal, and washed it down with water from the river, which was exceedingly sweet and cold.

"Well," said Guy, when they had all finished and the provisions were tied up and put aside, "it will do us no good to remain here any longer. The river, as you all know, is our only salvation, and the sooner we start on our cruise the better. The natives who once dwelt here are reported to have made journeys down this stream in boats. Is it not so, Canaris?"

"Yes," replied the Greek. "I have heard from the Arabs at Harar that it was their annual custom to go down to the coast in large rafts or boats with trading goods, and then return by land."

"But where does this underground river empty?" asked the colonel. "Does any one know?"

"It is supposed to reach the Juba," replied Guy, "but whether near the mouth of that river or not I cannot say."

"Ah! but that is a very important thing," said the colonel. "I possess some acquaintance with the geography of this part of Africa. Are you aware that the river Juba is nearly eight hundred miles in length? Its source, which as yet remains undiscovered, lies only a hundred miles or more to our west, and it flows to the southeast. This stream before us appears to head in a southwesterly direction as near as I can judge. It is possible then that it joins the river Juba at a distance less than two hundred miles from here. In that event our journey does not appear so formidable."

"Pardón me, sir," said Canaris quickly, "but from what I have been able to learn this river reaches the Juba at a point, I have heard stated, midway between Bardera and the coast."

"Bardera!" cried the colonel sharply. "Why, Bardera is only two hundred miles from the sea. According to that, we have a journey before us of nearly eight hundred miles—a journey underground and on unknown waters. Who can tell what dangers lie before us?"

"We will never get out alive," groaned Sir Arthur. "Never in the world, Carrington. What a blawsted idiot I was to let the government send me to that beastly hole!"

"And is it impossible to escape by land?" asked the colonel, unheeding this interruption.

"You forget that we have destroyed our only communication with the outer world," ventured Forbes. "The river is our sole hope."

"Yes, I had forgotten it, it is true," replied the colonel.

"And were the communication now open," exclaimed Guy, "escape would still be hopeless. This river is navigable, and the existence of those canoes proves what I say. I have been in tighter places than this before, and if

you will trust to my guidance I will do my best to bring you through in safety. If we fail, it shall be through no fault of mine."

CHAPTER XXII—AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

Guy's stirring speech was just what was needed to rouse the flagging spirits of the party, for the colonel's graphic description of the contemplated journey had produced a very depressing effect.

Preparations for the start were begun at once. The two canoes were first tested and found to be absolutely seaworthy. Then the provisions, the torches, the lamps, the oil flasks, and the rugs were divided into two parts and stowed away.

It was decided that Guy should be accompanied by Forbes and Sir Arthur in the first boat, and that Canaris and the colonel should follow in the second. For economy one torch was to be used for illuminating their way. The torch Sir Arthur was to hold in the rear of the canoe. Eight paddles had been found in the cavern, thus providing an extra supply in case of possible loss.

It was difficult to believe that the sun was shining brightly outside. No ray of light pierced the blackness of the cavern, and the dead silence was unbroken by the faintest sound, though at that very moment the Gallas and the Abyssinians were probably waging a bloody battle almost overhead. Henceforth day and night were one, all trace of time would be lost, and whether any of that imprisoned band would ever see the light of day again or breathe the free, open air, the future alone could tell.

It was a solemn and impressive moment, and Guy's voice had a touch of huskiness in it as he ordered the canoes to be carried to the water.

A last survey of the cavern was made to see that nothing was forgotten, and then all took their places in silence, the canoes swung slowly out from shore, and, caught by the current, shot off into the gloom on the first stage of the most awful journey ever made by living men.

Guy sat slightly in front of the stern, keeping the canoe straight with an occasional touch of the paddle, for the velocity of the current made labor unnecessary, and close behind him was Sir Arthur, holding the flaring torch that lit up the water for a short distance ahead and served to guide the second canoe, which was only a few yards in the rear.

"If this current continues all the way," observed Forbes, "eight hundred miles will be nothing at all."

"Yes, if no bad rapids are in the road," replied Guy. "There are certainly none very near, or we could hear them plainly."

"I don't think we need fear that very much," called out the colonel from the rear canoe. "The altitude of this part of Africa is not so high above the sea. The valley overhead is a pretty deep one, and the river is some distance beneath that yet. Moreover, those natives would hardly have made an annual cruise down the river if the channel was very dangerous."

"It was their custom to start at the close of the rainy season," said the Greek, "when the river was high and swollen."

"Don't mention rapids, I beg of you," cried Sir Arthur. "It makes me nervous. I can't stand it at all."

For an hour or more they traveled on in almost unbroken silence. On either side the shore was invisible, and overhead the glare of the torch revealed only black, empty space. The same intense silence prevailed, not even the faintest murmur of the river being audible.

This peaceful monotony, however, was rudely shattered. A low humming sound was heard in the distance, which rapidly increased in volume, and left no room to doubt that a course of rapids was below. At Guy's suggestion Forbes relieved Sir Arthur of the torch, and scarcely had this change been effected when the current carried them into a swirling mass of spray.

Both canoes grated and bumped against rocks, and then, before the frightened occupants could realize that it was over, the sullen roar was fading away in the distance, and the smooth current was bearing them rapidly ahead.

This little episode considerably relieved their minds. If no more dangerous water than that lay before them, there was little cause for apprehension. A skilled eye and a strong hand would overcome the difficulty.

Presently, for the first time, rocky walls appeared, now on one side, now on the other, but they fell sheer to the water, and gave no opportunity of landing. The atmosphere of the cavern was pure and fresh, a fact not readily accounted for, since no glimmer of daylight was anywhere visible.

Guy began to grow sleepy, a sensation which was shared by his companions, for it was many hours since they had had any rest. It was impossible to tell how long or how far they had traveled. All passage of time was lost, and the periods for eating and sleeping must be regulated entirely by their own feelings. Instinct rarely goes wrong in such cases, and there was little doubt that the night had come.

A sharp lookout was kept on the shores, but as the current swept them past the same monotonous ledges without a break, it began to look as though they would be compelled to take turns at sleeping in the bottom of the canoes.

They were paddling close along the right shore when a sudden cry from Canaris, who was almost abreast of the other boat, and farther out in the current, attracted general attention, and peering out on the river they saw a dim object some yards away.

The current bore them past it, but by dint of hard paddling the canoes were headed diagonally up stream, and a few moments later a landing was made on the lower end of a small spit of white sand, ten or fifteen yards in diameter.

It sloped gently to the water's edge, and in the center was a cluster of smooth, water worn stones.

It was a perfect haven of refuge to the weary and exhausted voyagers, and with thankful hearts they hauled the canoes upon the strip of beach and spread out the rugs in readiness for a few hours' sleep.

They ate sparingly of crackers and dates, for Guy had assumed charge of the commissary department, and dispensed supplies with no liberal hand, the wisdom of which was readily acknowledged by all.

The torch had been stuck end up in the sand, and its cheerful glow threw a radiance over all the little island and caused the silvery white sand to sparkle brilliantly.

They stretched themselves out on the rugs near the center of the island, and as soon as they were arranged comfortably Guy rigorously extinguished the torch and hunted his place in the darkness.

No thought of fear entered their minds. On all sides was the deep and rapid river. From whence could an enemy come? In five minutes not a man was awake. Even Sir Arthur was snoring profoundly, dreaming perhaps of the snug quarters in the residence at Zaila, from which he had been so rudely ousted a few short weeks before.

Guy was dreaming, too, but far different were the visions that coursed through his brain. For the twentieth time he was living over again his awful experiences of the previous year. Once more he was a prisoner in the rajah's fortress and Nana Sahib's cannons were awaiting their victim on the massive stone platform. Now he was being led out to die in the midst of his companions, the fiendish faces all about him, the Hindoos stood by the touch holes with lighted torches. Now they were binding him, the gaping muzzle was pressing his back—

Then he woke and sat up, trembling from head to foot, the dank perspiration standing in beads on his forehead. Thank God it was only a dream. The rajah's fortress was thousands of miles away.

Suddenly a faint sound reached his ear, so indistinct that he could hardly be sure he heard anything at all. He listened a moment, but it was not repeated.

"Some of the fellows stirring in their sleep," he muttered, and giving the matter no further thought, he lay down again.

But as soon as his head touched the sand the sound was repeated, and this time it was more definable—a steady, rustling noise, with an occasional low splash that seemed to come from the water.

It was caused by none of his companions, for they all lay on his left, while the alarming noise seemed to come from the right.

Guy was a brave man, but in his nervous condition, resulting from the recent dream, this new alarm was too much, and he felt a cold chill run down his spine.

Giving Forbes, who was next him, a gentle shake, he drew himself to his feet, and taking a match from his pocket, rubbed it with a trembling hand across the front of his trousers.

It struck fire instantly, and as the sudden flare lit up the whole extent of the island the match dropped from Guy's nerveless fingers and he started back with a cry of horror that echoed horribly through the gloomy recesses of the cavern.

CHAPTER XXIII.—A WONDERFUL ESCAPE.

GUY had presence of mind enough to strike a second match and ignite the torch, which was fortunately within reach of his hand, and as his companions,

roused from their sleep by his sharp cry of alarm, sprang excitedly to their feet, the flaming glare revealed to their astonished gaze a monstrous serpent coiled half on land, half in the water, at the edge of the island.

The flat, ugly head, with its wicked eyes, was darting angrily to and fro, and the body was as thick as a man's leg above the knee.

"Great Cæsar, it's a sea serpent!" cried Forbes, making a dash for his rifle, while Sir Arthur, with a dismal groan, dropped down on his knees and had to be dragged forcibly away by the colonel.

The glare of the torch seemed to anger the monster, for it advanced a yard or more up the island, and spattered the water furiously with its great tail.

A general rush was made for the canoes, and it would have been no difficult matter to have slipped quickly away and left the hideous monster in undisputed possession of the island.

Unluckily Forbes was bent on resistance. He seized his rifle, made sure that it was ready for use, and started forward just as Guy hurried to his assistance.

"Come away, Melton," he cried; "it will only make things worse if you wound it."

"But I don't intend to wound it," replied Melton. "I'm going to put a ball through that ugly head. Stand back, Chutney; stand back."

As he spoke he advanced recklessly until the muzzle of his rifle was within two feet of the serpent's head, and taking a quick aim pulled the trigger.

The stunning report shook the cavern, and as Forbes turned to flee, the enraged monster, with blood streaming from a hole in his neck, threw his slimy coils forward in convulsions of agony, and before the eyes of his horrified companions Melton was pinned to the ground.

He struggled to his knees, fighting desperately to loosen the tightening coils, and uttering heartrending appeals for help.

Then, with a mighty hiss, the serpent flapped wildly toward the water, dragging his victim with him, and with a terrific splash and a resounding slap of the great tail on the moist sand, both disappeared in the gloom.

With a terrible cry Guy ran to the water's edge and shouted again and again.

No response came back. The black river flowed as smoothly and calmly as before.

"Lost! Lost!" he cried hoarsely, and staggering backward he fell heavily on the sand.

The colonel ran to his assistance, and at that moment a single cry came distinctly from a point below the island.

"Listen!" exclaimed Canaris. "What is that?"

"Help! Help!" rang mournfully through the recesses of the cavern.

It was Melton's voice surely, and the familiar tones reached Guy's ears and brought him to his feet in an instant.

"It's Forbes!" he shouted wildly. "The canoe, quick," and snatching the heavy craft, he fairly threw it into the river and sprang in.

Canaris leaped after him, and seizing paddles, they drove the canoe swiftly toward the distant sound.

"We are coming, Melton; we are coming," cried Guy. "We'll save you yet."

In their haste the lighted torch had been left behind, but fortunately the Greek had matches, and in an instant another torch was lit and flaring cheerfully over the water.

"This way, Chutney," came a feeble voice below them. "Hurry up. I'm nearly exhausted."

A few rapid strokes of the paddle brought them within sight of a struggling object on the surface of the water, and as the canoe ran skillfully alongside, Guy dropped his paddle, and, leaning out, seized the drowning man by the collar. With almost superhuman strength he dragged him into the canoe without assistance.

"Thank God!" he cried, "he's safe. Speak to me, Forbes. Are you hurt?"

But Melton lay white and helpless in the bottom of the boat, too exhausted to reply.

"He's all right," said Canaris. "Don't make him talk. Take your paddle, Chutney. We'll have a struggle to make the island."

The Greek was right. Far above them shone the flickering torch, and the current was bearing them further away.

"I can't paddle and hold the torch at the same time," said Canaris. "We must be guided by the light on the island."

And they bent to the paddles with a will, shouting from time to time to encourage the colonel and Sir Arthur. It was even a harder task than they had feared—to force the canoe through that fierce rush of water. And for a time it seemed as though they were losing instead of gaining ground.

But at last the distant light grew brighter, and soon their friends could be seen standing on the edge of the island.

Ten minutes' more labor brought the canoe to the small eddy behind the island, and then the colonel hauled it gently upon the sand. They climbed wearily out and bore Melton tenderly up the slope. His clothes were foul and slimy from the serpent's embrace, but he did not seem to be injured.

A few drops of stimulant would have had a good effect, but as this was out of the question they did the next best thing under the circumstances. His wet clothes were stripped off and wrung out. Then he was wrapped snugly in three or four big rugs and laid in one of the canoes, which was emptied for the purpose. This heroic treatment had a speedy effect, and the patient, much to the relief of all, recovered from his prostration and insisted on sitting up.

"No, I don't think I'm hurt," he said, in response to Guy's inquiries. "It was the closest shave I ever had in my life, though. You may imagine how I felt when the monster dragged me into the river. I gave myself up for lost at once. He dived straight down, and then shot through the water like a streak. One coil was still around my body, and hard as I struggled I couldn't tear loose. My ears began to sing, and I knew I would have to

drown. Then I felt the coil grow a little looser, and with one desperate struggle I tore away and came to the top. The first thing I saw was the light away up on the island, and I shouted for help as loud as I could. I was terribly afraid you would not hear me, and all the time I was growing weaker and weaker, and the current was dragging me farther and farther away. Then I saw your torch almost beside me, and that is all I remember. I would have gone to the bottom in another minute, I know. It was horrible, Chutney. It makes me faint to think of it," and Melton closed his eyes with a little shudder.

There were tears in the eyes of all as they listened to this marvelous story of his escape, and a sterner realization came to them of the unknown and unseen dangers that encompassed them.

Further sleep was out of the question, and yet they could not well leave the island until Melton's clothes were partially dry.

"Suppose we try some fishing," suggested Guy. "I have lines, and we can bait the hooks with bits of dried meat."

"That would be an agreeable change in our bill of fare," said the colonel. "I second the motion."

"Gentlemen, I beg of you, don't harass my feelings by talking of fish," protested Sir Arthur, who was gradually recovering from his severe fright. "It makes me think of white bait dinners at Greenwich. I dined there two days before I sailed for Africa."

"And you will dine there again, many a time," replied the colonel. "Only keep up your spirits, Ashby."

"I hope so, I'm sure," groaned Sir Arthur, with a dismal shake of the head that belied his words.

Meanwhile Guy had been preparing the lines, and handing one to the Greek, they cast them in the eddy below the island. In less than five minutes Guy landed a trumpet, a fish of a deep purple color, a foot in length. Canaris hauled one out at the same time, and within an hour they had caught more than a dozen, all of the same species and of about the same length.

"We'll take them along with us," said Guy. "We may find driftwood enough to build a fire and cook them."

"And if we don't find any," cried Canaris, "we can cook them by holding them in the flame of the torch."

CHAPTER XXIV.—SIR ARTHUR WAKES AT THE RIGHT TIME.

At this point Forbes positively insisted on getting up, and in spite of the slight dampness that still lingered about his clothes he pulled them on and announced himself ready to start. All were glad to leave the spot which was connected with such a horrible event, and soon the island was far in the rear.

The second stage of the journey was monotonous and uneventful. A few slight rapids were encountered, but for the most part the river was swift and smooth.

The character of the shores now began to change, and instead of the

sharp ledges falling sheer to the water, sandy beaches skirted the edge, and from the canoes they could make out gloomy holes and passages that pierced the sides of the cavern.

They were strongly tempted at times to stop and explore these unknown mysteries, but the reflection that every moment thus wasted would prolong their stay on this underground stream always checked their impulse.

A flat, rocky ledge served for their next resting place. It extended back ten yards to a steep wall of rock, and here, in a hollow cavity, Canaris found a mass of driftwood that was dry enough to burn.

The fish were cooked rudely over a fire, but without salt they were unpalatable and no one cared to eat them.

The luxury of a camp fire was enjoyed while they slept, and although no watch was kept, the night—if night it really was—passed without alarm.

Colonel Carrington had managed to retain during his captivity a small note book and pencil. In this he kept a record of the journey, jotting down each night the incidents of the day's cruise, and a page from this diary will convey to the reader a clear idea of the uneventful manner in which the first week passed away—a week in long to be remembered contrast to the dreadful period that followed on its heels.

Third stage.—Traveled all day on smooth water. Rocky shores. Camped on an island. Could find no wood and slept in the dark.

Fourth stage.—Today we passed rocky islands in great profusion. Once far overhead we saw a single gleam of light shining in from a crevice. So far our calculation is correct. Day is day, and night is night.

Fifth stage.—Nothing important. Ran a few rapids and camped on the right shore on a sandy beach.

Sixth stage.—All goes well. We are making many miles a day. The current continues strong. Camped on flat rock in mid stream.

Seventh stage.—Current still good. River very wide and obstructed with rocks. Narrowly missed an upset several times.

Eighth stage.—Traveled rapidly. Camped on a big spit of sand on right shore. Vast cavern behind us. Too sleepy to explore it.

Here the peaceful monotony of the colonel's record ended. Here on this sloping sandy beach began the first of that string of fatalities which to their last moment will send a shudder through those who participated in them.

As the colonel stated, they were so weary from the long day's journey that no investigation was made of the vast cavern that lay behind them.

Guy advanced a few yards with his blazing torch.

"It probably terminates with a rocky wall," he said carelessly; "it's no use looking into it tonight."

Sir Arthur suggested that it would be well to make sure that no danger lurked in its dark recesses, but when Guy handed him the torch and bade him go satisfy himself, he very promptly declined the honor.

A meager supper was eaten, for already the stock of food showed a perceptible diminution, and by common consent Guy began from that time to serve out short rations.

A quantity of driftwood had been brought in the canoes from a previous camping place, and with this a small fire was built. In its cheerful flickering glow they fell asleep, and an hour later a faint gleam from the charred embers was all that relieved the darkness of the cavern.

When Sir Arthur Ashby turned uneasily on his rugs some time afterward, even this feeble light was gone. The ex-governor was consumed with a burning thirst. He had an undeniable craving for champagne and iced claret, but in the unavoidable absence of these drinks water would have to do.

As he sat up, a faint noise reached his ears from the direction of the canoes, and supposing it to be Canaris, who had performed similar favors for him before, he called out loudly :

"My good fellow, fetch me a drink, will you? I'm deucedly dry."

The noise instantly ceased and was not repeated, though Sir Arthur waited breathlessly for a full minute.

Once he fancied he heard a slight rippling of water, but that, too, ceased at once.

Then Sir Arthur uttered a loud shout, which speedily wakened his companions.

"What's wrong?" cried the colonel anxiously. "Did some one call? I surely heard a noise."

"I want a drink, that's all," said Sir Arthur. "I heard some one down at the canoes and supposed it was Canaris. Was it you, Carrington?"

"No, certainly not," exclaimed the colonel, now thoroughly awake. "Here, Chutney, Forbes, pass me a match, quick. I have none about me."

They were all on their feet instantly, and Guy lost no time in lighting the torch which he kept always by his side.

Holding it over his head he led the way to the shore, and the first brief glance showed only too plainly what was the matter.

"*One canoe is missing!*" he cried despairingly.

"What, you don't mean it!" exclaimed Forbes. "How can that be possible?"

"It's gone," said Guy blankly. "No doubt of it. Here is the mark of the keel leading down to the water. That's not the worst of it, though. Half our provisions are gone with it, and one lamp and an oil flask as well."

"By Jove, Chutney, it's that savage who has done this," cried Melton. "It can be accounted for in no other way. We forgot all about the scoundrel's presence in the cavern."

"But how could he have lived all this time without food?"

"I don't know," answered Melton. "He must have managed it in some way, though. These Gallas are tough, wiry fellows and can stand a good deal of hardship."

The circumstances all seemed to confirm Melton's supposition. Unfortunately the fact that this Galla warrior was also making the cruise of the river had been overlooked, and now, as a result of this negligence, they had lost a canoe and half of their supplies.

"We have one thing to be thankful for," said Guy. "If Sir Arthur

had not wakened when he did we would undoubtedly have lost all. His shout scared the rascal, and he did not wait to make off with the other canoe."

"Yes, here is the mark of a third boat," announced the colonel, who had been making an investigation on his own account, "and footprints are visible on the sand. The scoundrel must have been here when we landed."

"I warned you to make a search," said Sir Arthur, "but my advice was disregarded. You see the result."

"Prepare to start at once," interrupted Guy sharply. "We must pursue the thief and recover our canoe."

In less than five minutes they embarked and pushed away from the shore.

"Put out the torch," said Guy. "If the rascal sees the light he can get out of our way and we will pass him unperceived."

"But how will we capture him in the dark?" asked Melton.

"We must depend on our hearing," was the reply. "We will push ahead quietly and listen at intervals for the stroke of his paddle."

Under these circumstances the recovery of the canoe was very doubtful, but there was plainly no other course, so they proceeded to carry out Guy's plan as carefully as possible.

Five paddles were all that remained, one for each of them, and with quick, noiseless strokes they moved rapidly down the river, keeping the canoe headed with the current as far as possible, and pausing at times to listen for any trace of the fugitive.

Thus they journeyed for an hour or more, but no sound of any kind reached their ears, and it began to look very much as though the Galla had been passed unseen in the darkness.

"He could hardly have kept ahead of us for such a distance," said Forbes. "I'm afraid we have missed him, Chutney."

Guy made no reply. The canoe at that instant grated harshly on some obstacle, and throwing out his arms, Melton discovered that the current had carried them against one of the steep, rocky shores. He was about to shove the canoe forcibly away with his paddle when Guy whispered sharply:

"Hold tight to the rock. I hear something above us."

CHAPTER XXV.—THE JOURNEY ON THE LAKE.

In the deep silence all heard distinctly the low, steady dip of a paddle,

"Be ready with a match," whispered Guy. "When the canoe comes opposite, light the torch and I will cover the fellow with my rifle."

The sound grew louder and plainer, and Melton's finger was already trembling on the match when a terrific splash echoed over the water, followed instantly by a most awful and heartrending wail of agony, that caused every one to shudder from head to foot.

Perfect silence ensued, and the dip of the paddle was no longer heard. With nervous haste Forbes lit the torch, and the sudden light revealed an empty canoe floating bottom up a few yards out in the stream.

They paddled quickly alongside, and leaning over Guy turned the drifting boat right side up.

It was empty, of course. The contents had gone to the bottom, and near the center the frail sides, seen plainly in the torch light, were actually crushed inward like a shattered egg shell.

Where was the occupant of a moment before? What tremendous force had wrought this devastation?

The current carried them on and on, but no one spoke; no one dared utter the thoughts that were in his mind.

At last Guy said in faltering tones, "Nothing but a serpent could have inflicted that injury to the canoe."

"That was the meaning of the splash," replied Melton. "The huge coils must have been thrown around it. The poor fellow had only time for one cry when he was dragged out."

"Then the serpent must have been following us down the river," cried the colonel. "I supposed he was dead after that bullet hole in his neck."

"That serpent is dead," said Forbes solemnly, "or I should never have escaped from his coils. This is another serpent. The river must be the abode of many like them."

This alarming statement was unfortunately only too likely to be true. Sir Arthur was terribly distressed, and prophesied a speedy reappearance of the monster and a fate similar to that of the poor savage in store for them all.

His anxiety was shared by his companions, though not expressed as openly, and all possible haste was made to get away from the horrible spot.

A brief search was carried on in hopes of finding the lost provision bags, but with the exception of a single floating paddle nothing was picked up. The bags must have sunk with the lamp and oil flask.

Nothing was seen of the other canoe—the one originally taken by the savage—and they came to the conclusion that it had been purposely abandoned farther up the river.

The balance of that day they traveled with a dread sense of impending danger hanging over them. The terrible scene so recently witnessed had left an uneffaceable impression, and by tacit consent they paddled in silence, afraid of the sound of their own voices.

The river had suddenly become narrow, and ran with dizzy speed between two rocky walls that reflected on both sides the glow of the torch which Sir Arthur carried in the stern.

Half a dozen times they dashed through brawling rapids, but no mishap occurred, and as their increasing drowsiness warned them that night was close at hand, they succeeded in finding a landing place on the left shore which offered some protection until morning.

A small quantity of wood still remained, and with this a fire was kept burning all night, while they took turns at guarding the camp, for after the recent events they no longer dared to sleep unprotected and in utter darkness.

The scant amount of food now remaining was a source of great uneasiness, but Chutney infused fresh hope into the party by the confident prediction that if the present daily rate of speed was maintained the supply would last until the end of the journey.

Already the pure air of the cavern had done wonders for Sir Arthur and

the colonel, and they had nearly recovered their usual health and strength. The one canoe held them all very comfortably, and they seemed to make better progress than when they had been divided into separate parties.

That night nothing occurred to cause any alarm, and they resumed the cruise in fairly good spirits. The river still continued narrow and the current swift. No dangerous water was encountered, and everything was going on swimmingly, when Guy suddenly shouted with all his might, "Back water! Quick! quick!" and looking ahead they saw a steep rocky promontory, against which the current split and swung off into two channels, one to the right, the other to the left.

In spite of their utmost efforts they continued to float down inch by inch.

Which was the proper channel? It was a puzzling problem on which perhaps hung life and death. There was no time for consideration, and under the circumstances Guy adopted the only possible course.

"Head the canoe straight for the center of the rock and let her drift," he cried. "The current shall decide for us."

This was instantly done and they drifted with perfect accuracy straight for the splitting point in the stream.

For a moment it looked as though they would be flung against the rocks and upset, but as the canoe reached the turning point it trembled an instant in the balance and then darted headlong into the channel to the right.

"A good omen," cried the colonel. "The river Juba lies on our right. This must be the proper channel."

It was a very narrow channel, at all events, and a very swift one, too, for the rocky walls on either side were almost close enough to touch with the paddles, and they were moving at a dizzy rate of speed.

"There are rapids below us," said Forbes. "I can hear them dimly."

Melton's hearing was unusually acute, for as yet the rest could hear nothing, but in a few seconds the distant roar was audible to all, and it grew ominously louder with every second.

They grasped the sides of the canoe in anxious suspense—for it was useless to paddle—and the angry waters were almost in sight, when Sir Arthur dropped his torch, and instantly they were plunged in total darkness.

No time remained to strike a fresh light. The sullen crash of the waters drowned the sound of their voices, and the canoe blindly took its own course and they felt the chill spray spattering their faces.

"Bump, bump, bump," went the quivering boat, grinding and crashing on loose rocks, and then with one terrific lurch, that sent them sprawling on their knees, the violent tossing subsided and the choppy waves smacked the bottom of the canoe.

With some difficulty Guy lit a fresh torch, and its light revealed a strange condition of things.

No shore was visible on either side, and overhead was empty space instead of the low lying roof that always met their gaze.

"We are no longer moving," cried the colonel in astonishment.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Guy, but on putting his hand in the water all doubt was instantly removed. The canoe was stationary.

They paddled on to the right, to the left, in every direction, but the dark water, calm and sluggish, lay on all sides.

"We are on a lake," said Guy. "There is no doubt of it; a vast underground lake."

"There must be an outlet on the other side, though," replied Melton. "All we need do is to paddle across and find it."

"But which is the proper side?" said Canaris. "Are we headed straight now?"

"By Jove, I don't believe we are," replied Guy. "I'm afraid we are completely mixed up. We will paddle until we reach the shore, and then follow it till we come to the outlet."

"Yes, that will do very well," said the colonel. "The lake cannot be so very large. I wish we had time to complete a survey of it. I should like to make a report to the Royal Geographical Society."

"I wish the honorable members of the R. G. S. could change places with us," said Sir Arthur, with a groan. "I have no doubt some of those lunatics would enjoy this beastly hole. There is no accounting for taste, Carrington."

The colonel made no reply. He was keeping stroke with Chutney's paddle, sharing with him the outlook ahead. The minutes passed on, but still no signs of any shore.

"It's a pretty fair sized lake after all," said Guy.

"And we are the first white men to navigate its waters," remarked the colonel solemnly. "This is a wonderful discovery. Our fame as great explorers will be assured if we ever get back to England."

"Land ahead!" shouted Guy suddenly, and snatching the torch from Sir Arthur, he stood erect as the canoe shot gently towards a dim object that rose from the gloom twenty yards distant. Amid breathless silence the keel nicked the sandy beach and Guy sprang out.

One brief second he held the flaming torch aloft.

Then he turned and tottered with trembling limbs towards the canoe. He tried to speak, but no words came, and his face was pallid and horror stricken.

William Murray Graydon.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

CUPID'S NET.

AH, what is Cupid's net?

A web of filmy laces;

A trap for a coquette,

A means to show her graces;

A lure he loves to set

Before our very faces.

Ah, what is Cupid's net?

A web of filmy laces!

Harry Romaine.

THE BUNKEL MYSTERY.*

How the robbery of the rival banks became a matter of strange coincidences—Far reaching and totally unexpected results of an act of gallantry—The battles on Bunkel Island, and the frustrating of carefully laid plans.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

MR. SINGERLAY and Mr. Barkpool are the two wealthiest citizens of Montoban. The former is proprietor of the Montoban Mill, and president of the Montoban Bank; the latter owns the Onongo Mill, and presides over the Onongo Bank. They have long been enemies, and their quarrel is shared by their sons, Dolph Singerlay and Phin Barkpool, but both the latter are beset by the same desire: to have a steamer of his own on the lake. Andy Lamb is the son of Mr. Barkpool's engineer, and he rescues Diana Singerlay from the persecutions of Tom Sawder, a young hoodlum. Phin quarrels with him in consequence, and the father is dismissed from the Barkpool employ, only to be hired by Mr. Singerlay. Meantime Dolph and Phin, despairing of getting steamers from their fathers, rob the banks of which their fathers are the respective heads. They are surprised in their work by a professional burglar, called Poddy, and his assistant, Tom Sawder, who capture the two young gentlemen, together with a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and carry them off in a rowboat to Bunkel Island in Lake Montoban. Here they are kept in a grotto, effectually concealed from view; while Montoban supposes that the two banks have been robbed by the sons of their respective presidents. Andy Lamb, however, has his doubts on this point, and he tells Rynon, an officer who has been put on the case, about a strange man he has seen on Bunkel Island. Although Rynon declares that this is no trail, Mr. Singerlay insists that the island shall be visited, which is done, and while the fugitives are eating breakfast in the cave, Poddy commands silence at the sound of voices outside.

CHAPTER XXVI.—LOOKING FOR THE BOYS AND NOT THE MAN.

PODDY drew his revolver from his hip pocket when he heard the sound of voices near the entrance to the grotto, and looked savage enough to shoot all his companions. He suspended his trencher operations, and the others followed his example. He was afraid that even the working of their jaws might be heard by the intruders.

"If one of you speaks, or makes the least noise, I will kill him!" said Poddy, in a low but very impressive whisper.

Not one of them moved or ventured to utter a sound. They all listened, and could hear talking and the tramp of feet on the rocks outside of the cave.

"I tell you there is nothing here; and you are taking me on a wild goose chase," said one of the speakers outside. "We want the boys, and not the man you saw."

"I don't say there is anything here; and I don't see anything, though some one has been cutting down firs here," added another voice.

"Come along! I am not going to fool away any more of my time chasing a shadow," added the first speaker, who was at some distance from the opening by this time.

**This story began in the April issue of THE ARGOSY. The four back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 40 cents.*

This remark was followed by the tramping of feet on the rocks, and it was evident that the second speaker was leaving the locality, for no further sounds were heard. Poddy maintained silence for some time longer, though he resumed his trencher practice.

The meal was spread out on the platform which served as a bed at night. It was made up of cold dishes, consisting of cold chickens, sandwiches, a whole leg of ham, a keg of crackers, and plenty of bread and cheese. Only the coffee was hot.

By the side of the table was a large basket, which was well filled with provisions, all cooked and ready for use. It was plain that the robber had prepared for a long stay on the island, though he could not have laid in a stock for the two extra persons he had brought to the cave. However, it looked as though they could all live on the supply for a week at least.

It was a late hour for breakfast, and all of them seemed to be desperately hungry. Not one of them spoke after the sound of the voices ceased to reach them. As it did not look as though they were likely to be disturbed, Poddy's savage expression softened to its former amiability. But at least half an hour elapsed before he spoke, and the meal had been finished. Then he looked at Tom Sawder some time before he said anything.

"Do you know who those men were that we heard outside, Tom?" asked the leader.

"I'll bet I do!" exclaimed the hoodlum, grating his teeth with wrath.

"Hush! Do you want to call them back, you blockhead?" demanded Poddy, as he raised the pistol in his hand, though even Tom might have known that he did not mean to fire it, as the sound of it would have brought the visitors back to the vicinity. "Can't you speak without bellowing? Who were they?"

"One of them was Andy Lamb; and I should like to get hold of him!" replied Tom, in a more reasonable tone.

"Nonsense! That fellow would thrash you every time, as he did in the boat; and you had better keep away from him," added Poddy.

"Thrash me? He can't do it! Nor no other fellow in Montoban!"

"No matter about that now. Who was the other?"

"The other was Rynon; and he would like to get hold of me," chuckled Tom. "He took up the rest of our fellers, but he couldn't find me."

"Rynon, if that is his name, says he wants the boys," continued Poddy, taking no further notice of Tom, for whom he cherished a very decided contempt. "What does he mean by that?"

No one answered this question, and no one seemed to be able to do so at once. But it was the subject of consideration to Dolph and Phin. When the silence had prevailed for some time Poddy repeated the question.

"They are looking for the boys, and the officer don't take any stock in the man that was mentioned," said Dolph.

"I am that man," added Poddy, with a smile. "There can be no doubt of that. Tom Sawder very nearly gave me away."

"Git out! I didn't do nothin' of the sort!" exclaimed the hoodlum. "I don't never give nobody away. I ain't no sech a feller."

"Don't talk so loud, Tom," said the chief sternly. "Tom got into a row with that other boy, and got a thrashing, to say nothing of being knocked overboard."

"Wait till I git hold of Andy Lamb! Then you will see who'll git the thrashing," said Tom.

"We are willing to wait; but we were speaking of what had been, and not what is to be, though I shall bet on Andy," added Poddy, who seemed to take pleasure in thorning his brutal assistant. "I was afraid Tom would get killed, and I believe I showed myself to Andy."

"I didn't tell him to show hisself," said Tom, addressing the prisoners.

"Then Tom came on shore and wanted to borrow my revolvers. I refused to let him have them; but when he said he only wanted to scare Andy, I yielded. When I saw him blazing away at the sail boat with the young lady in it, I shouted to him, and said, 'None of that!' I did not mean Andy should hear me; but perhaps he did. That is the way Tom gave me away, for Andy is looking for the man he saw."

"Rynon did not care anything about the man; he wanted the boys," said Dolph. "Of course that means Phin and me."

"What makes you think so?" asked Poddy. "He may have meant Tom and his crew."

"But three of them are in the lockup now. If they had meant Tom, they would have said so, and not spoken of him in the plural number," argued Dolph.

"Tom thinks he is a host in himself, though the officers probably don't think so," suggested the robber.

"What time is it now, Mr. Poddy?" asked Dolph.

"Half past eleven," replied the chief, when he had consulted his elegant gold watch. "The forenoon is nearly gone; but we have nothing to do."

"Then everybody in Montoban knows that both banks were cleaned out last night. The fact came out at nine o'clock. Phin and I have been missed, and the keys have not been found. To sum it all up, Phin and I have the credit of having robbed both banks," said Dolph, with some excitement in his tones and manner.

"You are both of you entitled to that credit, for both of you intended to do just that thing," chuckled Poddy.

"Now they are looking for us, and not for you," added the son of the Montoban magnate. "My father never does things by halves, and by this time he has sent a description of me to New York, and perhaps to every city in the country."

"Very likely; and that will convince you that you are in the safest possible place in the whole world. They will not look for you on this island."

That ended the conversation. Without being a farthing better off than he had been the evening before, Dolph realized that he was published all over the land, to the grief and shame of his family, as a bank robber. It was a bitter thought, and down to the deepest depths of his being repented that he had ever harbored the wicked idea of robbing the bank.

When the breakfast things had been put away, Poddy opened the travel-

ing bag and spent the next hour in counting his villainous gains. As Dolph looked at him, he thought of the schemes that had flashed through his mind before he went to sleep. He had better be shot than live branded as a bank robber. He could not determine how it was to be done, but he firmly resolved to undo the mischief, or attempt to do so.

When Poddy was tired of looking at the immense mass of bank bills he went to the entrance of the grotto. Little by little he removed the firs from the mouth of the cave and then stepped out. He cautiously looked about him, and then out upon the lake in the direction of the town.

"All right!" exclaimed he. "They have left the island, and now I am monarch of all I survey. That boat is a mile off, and you can come out, Dolph and Phin; but you must not show yourselves."

"That is the Dragon, my boat," said Dolph. "Our visitors have left. Can we walk on the back of the island, where we can't be seen from the town?"

Poddy gave his consent.

CHAPTER XXVII.—TOM SAWDER'S BLOODTHIRSTY SUGGESTION.

"You will not show yourselves near the shore in any part of the island," said Poddy, after the prisoners had walked a few steps from the spot where the robber stood at the entrance of the cave.

"No one could see us from the main land," said Dolph.

"Some gunner or fisherman may be in a position to see you. If you please, I prefer that you should stay where no one can see you," added Poddy. "I can keep you in the cave all the time; but if I am good natured enough to let you take the air, you must observe my directions."

"Very well, Mr. Poddy; we will do as you say," returned Dolph.

"Keep away from the west side of the island, and you may go where you please on the other side," continued the robber, as he returned to the interior of the cave.

Poddy was satisfied that it was simply impossible for the prisoners to leave the island, as there was no boat except the one in the cave. The nearest part of the main land was half a mile distant, at the strait, while the channel was a mile and a half wide.

They were to keep away from the shore of the strait, and no person could see them across the channel. The robber did not even think it was necessary to watch them, though he was not likely to allow them to remain out of his sight for any great length of time.

Dolph led the way to the highest part of the island, which was directly over the grotto. There were plenty of firs growing on the summit, though the sides were exceedingly rough. The rocks lay as though a mountain of them had been dumped in this place, with a small proportion of earth mixed in with them. Here and there a crevice, sometimes amounting to what boys would call a cave, was to be found.

"What's going to be the end of this thing?" asked Phin, as his companion seated himself on a rock near the summit of the hill.

"That depends," replied Dolph, looking earnestly into Phin's face.

"Depends upon what?" asked Phin, suddenly animated by the possibility of a change in the current of their affairs, for there was something in the expression of his fellow prisoner which denoted the presence of activity in his mind.

"Upon ourselves," answered Dolph, in a low tone, after he had looked all about him to make sure that Poddy was not near them.

"What do you mean?" asked Phin, in the same low tone.

"It looks as though we might be kept here a week, or perhaps a month; and we may as well do something in the beginning as in the end," added Dolph cautiously, for he distrusted both the discretion and the pluck of his associate; but it was because he knew less about him than of any other boy in Montoban.

"What can we do?" inquired Phin, to whom the idea of doing anything was a new revelation.

"One and one make two, on one side; and one and one make two, on the other side," replied Dolph, rather mysteriously, though his looks expressed more than his words.

"That makes two on each side," added Phin, who had no difficulty in comprehending as much as this.

"I see that you know what I mean."

"Poddy and Tom on one side; you and I on the other."

"Just the idea."

"But—one and one make two, again," added Phin.

"What?"

"Revolvers."

"Just so."

"One plus one equals zero plus zero: bad equation."

"Two plus two equals two minus two. Change all the signs and the value of the members remains the same."

But Dolph had come to the end of his algebra, and he had made a blunder. Phin understood him, however. The other side had two revolvers, and they had none. If they could get possession of both weapons, the forces on the two sides would be reversed.

Dolph had ascertained that his hereditary enemy was willing to listen to him; and this was all he wanted.

"How to get the shooters," continued Phin.

"Take them," replied Dolph.

"Not easy."

"Can be done."

"Perhaps."

"Hush!"

Dolph rose from his sitting position and looked all around him. Then he listened. A very indistinct murmuring sound could be heard by both of them. Dolph dropped upon the bit of earth under them, and put his ear to the ground, for he had read Indian stories enough to know how it was done. He listened for a few minutes, and then rose from the ground.

Dolph was somewhat excited as the result of his listening. Phin could not understand him, but he lay down on the ground and listened. He could hear the confused sound of voices in a conversation carried on in a low tone.

"In the cave," said Dolph in a whisper.

"Yes," replied Phin in the same manner.

"Say no more here," added Dolph; and Phin nodded his assent to the precaution.

But Phin evidently had an idea, though he had not overflowed with them before. Without getting up he dropped on his hands, and began to creep in the most cautious manner away from the spot. When he had gone less than a rod, he halted at an opening in the rocks. It was a rent not more than three feet wide; and it looked as though a quantity of large pieces of the boulder had been dumped into it.

At this aperture Phin stopped and put his head down into the rent as far as he could. It was plain to him that the opening extended all the way through into the grotto, though it was not practicable for the passage of even a small boy in its present condition. If the loose rocks were removed, an entrance to the cave might be made.

Phin pointed to the rent, but he did not say a word; and Dolph was prudent enough to follow his example. The latter had done some thinking in the grotto while waiting for breakfast that morning. There was a snapping fire at the end of the cave, at the farthest point from the entrance; and the thinker wondered that the subterranean chamber was not filled with smoke.

There was no smoke there, and he had wondered how it escaped. This rent in the rocks explained the matter to his satisfaction. As the fragments of the boulder were large, so were also the interstices between them. At any rate, there was an effective chimney. Suddenly Phin, with his head in the hole, raised his hand, and both of them listened.

The voices of Tom and Poddy could be distinctly heard, and they seemed to take no pains to stifle the sounds. They had evidently been silent before; and Poddy did not seem to take any pleasure in the conversation of his brutal companion. Of whatever crime he was capable, the bank robber was a gentlemanly villain, though he was not a whit the better for that.

"What you goin' to do with them cubs, Poddy?" was the first sentence which was understood by the listeners.

"Knock them on the head when I have done with them," growled Poddy, as though he did not care to talk with his companion.

"You let 'em go about as though they hadn't no tongues in their heads, nor no legs on their carcasses," added Tom.

"They can't get away."

"I dunno about that. There's lots of driftwood round the island, and they can make a raft."

"It would take them two hours to get to the nearest shore, and I should see them before they got off," replied Poddy, who was plainly considering such a possibility as Tom suggested.

"The best way is to shoot 'em both, and drop 'em into that hole," added the hoodlum.

"Do you want your neck stretched?" demanded the other.

"Stop the cave up, and fill the hole with rocks; then nobody'd never find 'em."

"We will do all that if it is necessary," added Poddy.

Then Tom wanted one of the revolvers; and the chief gave it to him after he had shown his need of it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—THE DESPERATION OF THE PRISONERS.

It was Tom Sawder's idea that he might be put into a tight place if the prisoners were allowed to roam about the island at their own pleasure. They might catch him alone, and perhaps both of them together might get the upper hand of him. They could tie him to a tree, and then fall upon Poddy when he was asleep, or not on his guard.

This was the argument that induced the chief to surrender one of the revolvers to his reckless companion. Phin and Dolph were appalled at what they heard. Even the gentlemanly villain proposed to "knock them on the head" when he was done with them. Tom might fire at them at any time, and he was disposed to do so.

The hoodlum regarded the prisoners as a decided impediment. He was in as great a hurry to get away from the island as the sons of the magnates. His imagination was fired with visions of reckless dissipation in the great city, where his pockets would be filled with money.

As soon as the younger reprobate had obtained the revolver, he alluded to a division of the "swag," as he called it, for he had made some progress in the rogue's vocabulary under the tuition of Poddy.

The prisoners on the island did not feel so much interest in this matter, and Poddy evidently did not relish the topic, and was not willing to discuss it. He promised to make a fair division of the money, and this satisfied Tom for the time. Not another word was to be heard, and very likely Poddy had gone to sleep.

Phin raised his head from the trying position in which he had placed it, and moved away from the chimney of the cave, as they afterwards called the opening. They continued to crawl until they had put ten rods between themselves and the grotto. Phin had taken the lead in these last movements, and Dolph followed him without making any objection.

Phin rose to his feet, and made a careful survey of the ground about him. He could see no holes in the rocks near him. The surface was very irregular, and the firs and savins were thick.

No cavities which could possibly contain a listener were to be seen in the vicinity. Both of them were sure that no one could hear them.

It afterwards proved that they were mistaken.

"We have nothing to hope for in the future," said Phin, as he looked Dolph in the face; and both of them had a lugubrious aspect.

"If Tom Sawder has his way, we are not long for this world," replied Dolph. "He has a revolver now, and he would use it on the slightest pretense."

"That's so," said Phin solemnly. "I agree with you now that we must do something."

"I am not going to be cowed down and trodden upon by such a vagabond as Tom Sawder. "I can't stand it; I am not used to that sort of thing," added Dolph, his eyes snapping with wrath.

"I am no more used to it than you are," returned Phin. "But what can we do in the face of two revolvers?"

"We might as well be shot first as last."

"I don't believe Poddy will take the trouble to get us out of the scrape," said Phin thoughtfully. "They can't stay on Bunkel Island forever, you know."

"Their provisions won't last more than a week, even if they hold out as long as that."

"Then they must leave. Whether they stay here three days, a week, or a month, the time is sure to come when they must leave. They are not going to starve on this island, even if they have to run a big risk in getting away from it. What do you think they are going to do with us when that time comes?"

"That's the question," added Dolph, who could easily imagine the situation his companion described.

"Do you think they are going to encumber themselves with two fellows who will be of absolutely no use to them?" asked Phin, with energy, almost giving way to weeping in despair over the fate that was apparently in store for them.

"Of course they will not take us with them," answered Dolph; but the difficult problem seemed to make him rave with anger rather than cry in hopeless submission.

"What are they going to do with us when that big time comes?" demanded Phin, actually shaking with emotion.

"I give it up!" exclaimed Dolph, who was sorry to see his fellow prisoner choking with feeling, and was inclined to lift him out of his despondency if he could.

"What *can* they do with us?" asked Phin.

"They can leave us on the island," replied Dolph, trying to laugh for the benefit of his associate in misery.

"Will they do that?"

"That is all they can do, unless they adopt Tom Sawder's cheerful suggestion, and blow our brains out," replied Dolph lightly, though his manner belied his feelings. "They will have to leave us here, since we agree that they will not take us with them."

"But how will they leave us?" persisted Phin, who could not see any possible bright side to the question.

"They will launch their boat, and leave us; that's the whole of it."

"That is not the whole of it. If they would do that I should not complain. We could build a raft, as Tom said, and get to the main shore. Of course we should tell the whole story as soon as we got back to Montoban, and the wires of the telegraph would trip up the robbers before they got to

a safe place," reasoned Phin. "They are not going to leave us in any such way."

"As you seem to know, Phin, how are they going to leave us?" asked Dolph, with a laugh, for he was only anxious to bring his companion into his own condition of mind.

"They are going to tie us hand and foot, and leave us in the cave!" exclaimed Phin, with melodramatic earnestness. "Then they are going to stop up the entrance of the hole with that big rock which lies near it."

"I think you are right, Phin," said Dolph, in the most encouraging tones. "They are not going to leave us in a situation to start a pursuit of them."

"Nobody in Montoban has the least suspicion that we are on Bunkel Island; they are looking for us in New York City and elsewhere. We should starve to death in the cave; die a lingering death, prolonged for weeks, perhaps," said Phin, with a shudder.

"You take a cheerful view of the end of the whole matter, though it seems to me that you are wholly right," returned Dolph. "The robbers can't do it in any other way. They must either shoot us or tie us in the cave so that we can't get out. They are not going to take any risks, of course. Poddy has one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cold cash in his bag, and he can be a count on the Lake of Como if he succeeds in making his escape."

"We need not argue the matter any more, for we agree perfectly," added Phin, who in some measure ascribed this result to his own logic and eloquence.

"Then all we have to do is to strike now!" said Dolph, in a low tone, but with the most determined energy.

"What do you mean?" inquired Phin, who had not got so far as his companion.

"We must change the signs in both members of the equation by getting possession of the two revolvers."

"Can we do that?" asked Phin, amazed at the idea.

"We can try!"

"But we may be shot."

"That will not be half so bad as being shut up in the cave, with our hands and feet tied, to starve to death!" exclaimed Dolph. "Better be shot than starved. But we have a good chance to succeed. If you will take Tom, I will take Poddy. When they are asleep, we have more than an even chance with them. Get the revolvers, and then use them."

"I don't think I could handle Tom," said Phin.

"Not when you take him asleep?"

"I will think how to do it," added Phin, shrinking from such a contest as was indicated.

"I have thought of it all, and you can do it as easily as you can tumble down on the ice. The first thing will be to hit him the heaviest crack on the head you can with a club or a rock," said Dolph earnestly. "I know I can fix Poddy the first time trying."

"Hush!" whispered Phin, as he heard a sound near them, and expected to see Tom Sawder the next instant with the revolver ready for use.

But, instead of Tom, Andy Lamb showed himself.

CHAPTER XXIX.—AN OBSTINATE AND INCREDULOUS OFFICER.

ANDY LAMB, on the morning of the robbery of the banks, had been obliged to remain at home later than usual on account of the absence of his father, who had gone to the Montoban Mill at three o'clock to start the fires under the boiler. His son had carried his breakfast to him at half past eight, for the engineer did not want to eat it till he had the mill in good working order, and had taken a little food when he left the house.

On his return, shortly after nine, Andy heard of the robbery of the bank. He had almost jumped up into the air when the news came to him. He was startled, as everybody was, and the thought of the man he had seen on Bunkel Island was his first consideration. Of course he could not say that the mysterious stranger he had seen was the robber, though he felt almost sure of it.

He went to both banks, and gathered all the news there was to be had, and then returned to the engine room of the mill to relate it to his father. Mr. Lamb told him to go home with the pail and tell his mother what had happened, and by that time the officers would be ready to hear him, for they were busy then looking up the facts.

The engineer owned a very fine revolver, which had been presented to him by his associates in the shop when he left his former situation. He told his son to take this weapon, for after the display of arms the day before at the island he thought Andy should be provided with the means of defense.

The young man had practised a good deal with this arm, and he was prudent and discreet, so that he could be trusted with it. It was rather large, but Andy put it into his hip pocket, and took a box of cartridges. On his return to the lower part of the town it had come out that Dolph and Phin were missing, and that each of them must have taken the keys of the bank from his father's house.

This discovery seemed to upset Andy's theory that the mysterious stranger was the perpetrator of the robbery. His father, too, was confident that the two boys were the guilty persons. Andy was somewhat staggered in his belief, but it still seemed to him that the stranger must have had something to do with the robbery. What was he doing on the island? Why had he taken so much pains to conceal himself if he was an honest man? But the machinist told him to give his information to the officers.

Andy left the mill, and then he saw one of the policemen examining the Dragon. He decided to see him, and hastened to the boat house. He felt that half the strength of his case had been removed by the absence of the boys, but he cudged his brains to recall all the events at the island.

Suddenly it occurred to him that Tom Sawder was missing as well as Dolph and Phin. The hoodlum certainly had some connection with the mysterious stranger. He had conveyed a considerable raft of boards to Bunkel, which must have been for the use of the man he had seen. Then Tom

must have obtained his revolvers from him. The vagabond certainly had some relations with him.

The stranger had said "None of that!" to Tom when the latter fired the pistol for the first time. He would not have done that if they had not been associated in some manner. This reasoning from the meager facts in his possession strengthened him in his belief that the stranger and Tom knew all about the robbery.

He told his story to Rynon. The officer had his theory, and was not willing to believe anything that conflicted with it. It was only when Mr. Singerlay insisted that he would consent to visit the island. Rynon was sure that the boys had robbed the banks and taken a train to some distant point early in the morning.

The magnate told them to take the Dragon for their visit to the island. The sail boat was provided with a small tender, which Dolph used when he wanted to land where the water was shoal near the shore. Andy was in favor of taking this tender with them, and insisted upon doing so. The magnate had to interfere again in his favor before the policeman would yield the point.

Rynon was far from enthusiastic in the mission he had consented to undertake, and he growled all the way to the island. They looked it over in half an hour, and Andy was forced to admit that he found nothing to justify his confident assertions that Tom and his associate were concealed there.

At the same time he asked Rynon a few hard questions, which the officer could not answer. Tom had rafted a lot of boards from the town to Bunkel, having probably stolen them. Where were those boards? Not a splinter of one of them could be found. What had become of them? Tom could not have conveyed them back to Montoban.

Rynon could not answer any of these questions; he declared that it was of no consequence what had become of the boards. He would not take the trouble to reply to Andy's suggestions. He had been an officer for twenty years, and he was not going to be led by the nose by a boy. He knew what he was about and he did not want any advice.

"You said that Tom and the man went on in the boat at the time you arrested Bob Rottle and the others, Mr. Rynon?" said Andy, who had another point to make with the officer before they left the island.

"That is what I said; but it has nothing at all to do with the robbery of the banks," replied Rynon, very crustily, if not angrily.

"The man picked up the four boys who were hanging to the wreck of the boat, I think you said," continued Andy, as pleasantly as he could speak. "Where did he land them, if you please?"

"I don't know; I was not on the island at the time; but I found the three boys I arrested over on the east side of the island. They had been to the landing rock in search of Tom and the man. They could not find them or see anything of the boat."

"If the boat had left the island, it must have crossed the channel," added Andy.

"I suppose so, for the boys would have seen it if it had crossed the strait," growled the officer.

"I think that is plain enough, Mr. Rynon, for the boys went back to the west shore after they had looked over the channel, and you found them there. I contend that they could not have crossed the channel, for it is a mile and a half wide, and the boys would have seen them if the boat had left on that side of the island," argued Andy, with a good deal of earnestness.

"I don't care whether it did or did not; it has nothing to do with the robbery committed by Dolph and Phin, for neither of them were on the island, or anywhere near it," answered Rynon roughly. "We have looked the island over, and there is not the ghost of a sign to show that the robbers are here. That is all I want to know."

"I am not satisfied yet," said Andy.

"I don't care whether you are satisfied or not," replied the officer, as he walked down to the landing rock. "I did not come down here to satisfy you, but myself. I know the robbers are not here, and have not been here, and I am going back to town. Do you think, after twenty years' experience, I don't understand this sort of business better than you do?"

Andy realized that it was useless to attempt to get ahead any farther with such an officer as Rynon; and he thought he could borrow a detective from any ten cent novel who would have more shrewdness than his companion.

"If it is all the same to you, Mr. Rynon, I should like to remain here a little while longer. I will pull back in the tender when I want to go home," said Andy, for he could not think of leaving the island until he had made a more thorough examination of the place for himself.

Andy embarked in the tender, and while the Dragon was standing up the lake on her way to Montoban, he pulled over to the east side of the island. Under one of the cliffs he stopped to consider the situation. He and Rynon had examined the island without finding the slightest evidence that the man was still on the island. The boards must be on the island, and he was determined to find them.

CHAPTER XXX.—THE CONFERENCE ON THE ISLAND.

TOM and the man, if they had committed the robbery, or had a hand in it, might have escaped in their boat to the main land, and departed to parts unknown; but they could not have taken the boards with them. The lumber, or a part of it, had been taken ashore, to Andy's certain knowledge. Now it had disappeared with the man and Tom. It was a mystery, to say the least, whether or not it had any connection with the cleaning out of the two banks.

Andy knew of a place on the west shore where he could leave the tender in safety, for he was general enough not to trust himself on the island without leaving open his line of retreat. He could shove it in under the rocks, and then walk on a sort of shelf to an accessible part of the island.

He came to the lower level of the island just below the hill which lay between the landing rock on the south side and his present position. He had hardly reached the plain, as visitors called the lower part of the island, before he was sure that he heard footsteps on the side of the hill.

As a matter of precaution, he dropped upon the ground ; and then, as another measure of the same kind, he examined his revolver, which was not yet loaded. Such a weapon does not amount to much when its barrels are empty, though it is sometimes a very convenient bugbear.

If the persons whom he was to see soon were the man and Tom, an empty pistol was not the thing for them, and he charged all the barrels of the weapon. Then he listened, and he was not a little excited. He did not care even to meet Tom Sawder face to face, for that would mean fight ; but he wanted to see where he concealed himself.

Rynon and Andy had been all over the island without obtaining any evidence that there was a human being on it. Andy had resisted the officer's conclusion and had almost quarreled with him. Now the sound of footsteps, whoever made it, proved that he was right, and he was bountifully encouraged.

The savins grew with their lower branches almost on the ground. They were to be found in groups, and it was an easy thing to obtain perfect concealment. At the place where he had halted and dropped upon the ground three of them growing in the form of a triangle promised him the security he desired at that moment.

Andy continued to listen, while he slowly and cautiously worked himself into the clump of savins. The footsteps were still to be heard. In a few moments he was satisfied that more than one person was descending the hill, whose rough side compelled them to move very slowly and carefully. There were two of them, and they must be Tom and the man.

The listener took out his revolver and held it in his hand, for he feared that he might be suddenly called upon to use it. In a short time he heard voices, though they were not loud enough for him to distinguish what was said. If the two were talking, one of them must be Tom Sawder, though neither of the voices sounded like his.

The persons who were approaching reached the plain. They looked about them, as Andy judged by the sounds. Then they came together quite near the three savins which hid him, but they had only searched in the open places. They seated themselves, and having assured themselves that no one was near they spoke out loud.

The first time one of them used his full voice Andy was astounded and bewildered. It was neither Tom nor the man who spoke ; it was Phin Barkpool. The listener could hardly believe the evidence of his own ears. Then he heard the answer to the first remark in the tones of Dolph Singerlay.

The sons of the two magnates of Montoban were on Bunkel Island, in spite of the theories and the absolute certainty of Rynon that they were not there. The telegraph was pursuing them all over the country, and here they were within three miles of the banks they had plundered ! Officers were looking for them in the great cities, but they were in sight of home.

It took some time for Andy to realize the truth of this, though his senses gave him all the evidence he needed.

If the boys were here, the vast sum they had stolen could not be far off.

Andy was almost carried away at the idea of being instrumental in restoring the money to the banks.

But Dolph and Phin did not wait for him to subdue his emotions. They went on talking about the situation, and Phin, who had the floor, painted a terribly black picture of their immediate future. He listened to the entire conversation till the prisoners had decided to rebel against the fate in store for them.

At this point Andy crawled out of his place of concealment, and walked toward the spot where the conversation was going on.

Of course, he had received a new revelation from what he had heard. It did not appear that Dolph and Phin had robbed the banks. They were prisoners in the hands of some other persons, who were doubtless the real robbers.

How the sons of the magnates had been carried off, if they were not concerned in the crime, was a puzzling problem which Andy could not solve, and he gave it up, for he had not a single fact to bear upon the question.

As soon as he could crawl out of the shelter of the savins, he stood up, with the revolver still in his hand. The two boys heard his steps and were alarmed.

"Andy Lamb!" exclaimed Dolph, as soon as he saw the son of the machinist.

"Andy Lamb," repeated Phin, and it is safe to say that he felt none of the malice he had nursed the last time they were together.

"I did not expect to find you here," replied Andy, looking from one to the other. "I have heard what you have said during the last half hour."

"Then you know all about our situation," added Phin.

"No, I can't see through it at all. I know that you are here—that you are in danger of being shot or starved to death," Andy explained. "I have not the least idea how you happen to be here, or who is going to shoot or starve you. I am utterly astonished to find you here, for your father, Dolph, has telegraphed all over the country to find you."

"That is what I supposed he would do," added Dolph.

"Everybody in town is satisfied that you two robbed the banks, and that you have got away with all the money," continued Andy.

"They are all mistaken; we did not rob the banks, though I won't deny that we intended to do something of that kind in a small way," added Dolph, hanging his head, for he had made progress enough in his misery to be ashamed of what he had tried to do.

"Who did rob the banks?" asked the newcomer, his wonder increasing.

"A man that Tom Sawder calls Poddy, though I think, from one of Tom's slips of the tongue, that his real name is Ben Podgate," answered Dolph.

"What has become of the money?"

"It is in a traveling bag in the cave."

"In the cave! What cave?" asked Andy. "I never heard of any cave on Bunkel Island."

"I never did till we were brought here at about two o'clock this morning. It is under this hill."

Both Dolph and Phin looked about them anxiously at this point of the conversation, for they had been absent over an hour from the cave, and it was time for one of the robbers to be on the lookout for them. Andy was almost sure he heard a sound in the direction of the entrance to the grotto. But they could discover nothing either with the eye or the ear.

Andy was burning with curiosity to hear more of the experience of the two young magnates; in fact, he thought it was necessary for him to know more before he reported to Leffwing, who stood at the head of the police force of Montoban.

He conducted his companions to the shelf of rock by which he had landed. It was only wide enough for them to stand in single file; but there he listened to the whole narrative of the robbery.

They were not more than three feet above the water, and a northeasterly wind was blowing with considerable force, having greatly increased in violence since Andy's arrival. The waves wet the trio as they stood on the shelf, and they could hear the tender, in its place of concealment, thumping against the rocks.

Dolph decided that they could not cross the channel in the tender, and he and Phin decided to return to the cave so as not to excite suspicion.

CHAPTER XXXI.—ANDY SHELTERS HIMSELF FROM THE GALE.

PHIN was the more timid of the two prisoners, though he had a fair share of pluck. He had heard, or thought he heard, noises which indicated the approach of one of their persecutors, and they made him nervous. If Poddy had thought they were absent too long, he was more likely to send Tom to see where they were than he was to go himself.

If the hoodlum saw Andy Lamb with them he would be inclined to shoot some one, and the presence of a visitor might be a sufficient excuse for doing so in the estimation of the leader. But Phin thought that a good excuse would be little consolation after any one of the trio on the rocky shelf had been shot. He preferred to avoid the shooting, and his companions agreed with him.

It was a thing understood from the beginning of the conference that Andy should convey the prisoners back to Montoban; but when they looked at the lake, they all agreed that it was impracticable to do so in the tender.

The little boat was quite as handsome as the sloop to which it belonged, but it was hardly big enough to hold more than two persons. It was long for its beam, and would upset upon the smallest provocation. It answered the purpose for which Dolph used it when the lake was reasonably smooth.

In the present rough condition of the water, it would simply have been suicide to attempt to cross the channel in so small a boat. All three of them agreed on this point. It was necessary, therefore, for the prisoners to report at the grotto.

Andy could not arrange any plan with them, for he was not willing even

to trust himself alone in the tender. He must remain on the island for the present ; but he would return to Montoban as soon as the weather would permit.

Of course a force from the town would come to the assistance of the boys as soon as the situation was made known there. This was all the arrangement that could be made. Until this could be done it would not be prudent to allow the robbers to know that a visitor had been to the island.

Phin had proposed that Andy should work around the island in the tender, and cross the strait on the west side. Dolph, however, was sure that it was even rougher in the narrow passage than in the wide one, for it was more exposed to the action of a northeast wind. The only thing they could do was to wait ; and to boys this is the hardest thing in the world to do. The prisoners returned to the cave, leaving Andy standing on the shelf of rock.

The engineer's son was quite as eager to do something at once as his late companions had been. But the weather was decidedly bad. It had been cloudy since nine o'clock in the morning, and the sky was blacker and more threatening than it had been when Andy arrived.

It looked like a storm, and the wind was continually increasing. The waves broke against the rocky shores of the island, for the wind had a sweep of two miles, and the rollers were heavy for a small lake.

Andy felt as though his wheels had been blocked, for he could do nothing, in spite of his good intentions. He wondered if Mr. Singerlay, when he was told that he had been left on the island with nothing but the frail tender, would not send the Dragon back for him. The magnate must see that it was impossible to return in the little craft when the wind was blowing a stiff gale.

But Mr. Singerlay was not likely to think of the boys' peril ; at this time he had enough to keep his mind busy. But Andy was sure his father would think of him when night came, and he did not return. At the worst, he was satisfied he could stand it till the next morning, though it was not pleasant to think of spending the night out of doors on the island, in a storm from the northeast.

He had heard the tender bumping against the rocks in the water cave where he had put it. He was afraid it would be injured by the commotion of the waves, and he decided to go down and look out for it. Possibly he could find a shelter during the storm under the rocks. He had visited the place many times before, and he knew, or thought he knew, all about it.

The rocks, as at Castle Hills and the Bay of Islands near them, seemed to have been shaken up by some convulsion of nature at an earlier period. If they had been rent and split up by an earthquake or a volcanic eruption, they would have been left very much as visitors found them.

They were pierced in every direction with crevices, apertures, and clefts of all shapes and sizes. There were half a dozen of these holes on the east shore of Bunkel Island.

The one which Andy had chosen, on account of the shelf which afforded a good chance to land on the island, was an opening in the form of a shelter tent. He had been in it several times, but he had never had any desire to

examine it carefully. He knew that the rocks were honeycombed with openings, as a load of large stone chips would be when dumped on the ground from a cart.

Andy had backed the tender into the cavern, which was about ten feet deep, so that he could secure the painter on the shelf. He drew the boat up to his landing place, and stepped into it. Letting go of the cord which held it, the tender immediately drifted back to its former position. The stern rested against an upright mass of rock.

The wind did not blow directly into the little grotto, and the water in it was sheltered by the abutment on the weather side. Andy shortened the painter so that the tender should not hit the rock at the stern. Then, with a small line he found in the boat, he rigged a stay on each side, which he attached to the rocks.

Thus secured, the boat pitched and rolled on the uneasy waters, but it was safely moored so that it could not strike the rocks at any point.

Andy seated himself in the stern of the tender, and put on the overcoat he had brought with him in anticipation of rain, for the air was quite chilly. He could hear the roar of the surging waves as they beat upon the rocky shore ; but he felt quite comfortable.

In this easy position he began to consider the events of the preceding night. He found abundant occupation for his thoughts ; but he had hardly entered upon the subject when he was startled by the sound of a voice quite near him, as he thought.

The sound did not seem to come from the direction of the lake, where the only opening he knew anything about was situated. The voice seemed to be in the very heart of the rocks. It appeared to come from some point over his head, though not directly above him.

He was alarmed, not for his personal safety, but because the security of his position was threatened. He looked about him ; but, except on the surface of the water, it was so dark that he could not make out anything.

Andy was not a smoker, but he made the fire in the cook stove for his mother in the morning, and he carried a tin box of matches in his pocket. He lighted one of them.

By the feeble light of the match he discovered that there was a considerable crevice on the south side of him. Casting off the stay on the opposite side, he moved the tender over to the aperture. Pieces of rock had fallen from above, and formed a rough platform just above the water.

It followed that, if he could hear the persons above him, they could hear him if he made a noise. He did not, therefore, deem it prudent to get upon the platform.

As he reached over and put his head into the aperture, which was like an oven, he could see gleams of light. It was evident that the crevice in the rocks reached to the summit of the hill, though it was so crooked and irregular that no direct rays of daylight could penetrate through it to the lower cavern in which Andy had sought shelter.

"Tom ! Tom !" shouted the person whose voice Andy heard. "Wake up ! I have called you a dozen times !"

"What do you want?" asked the well known voice of the hoodlumi.

"Go out and see where those boys are. They have been gone over an hour; but don't bring them in till I tell you," added the first speaker; and Andy concluded that he was Poddy.

Nothing more was said, and it was plain that Tom left the grotto to obey the order of the chief.

But Andy heard other sounds, and he gave his attention to them. He was sure the noise was nearer than the interior of the cave, which he now knew was above him, but farther than his own grotto from the lake.

The sound was that of something descending the crooked shaft which led to the top of the hill. He looked in vain for a sight of anything, for the tortuous passage did not enable his vision to reach more than six feet. He was alarmed, for Poddy might be descending the crooked passage. He took out his revolver, and prepared it for use.

The moving body, whatever it was, bumped from side to side in its descent, but it came nearer the water cave every moment. It was not a man, and Andy put up his weapon. He was afraid to light another match lest the glare of it should be seen by the bank robber above.

The object struck the rough platform. Then it was jerked up and down several times, and the observer could faintly discern a dark body, floundering about like a live animal.

When it ceased to move Andy put his hand on it. It was a large travelling bag. It was very heavy, and his heart bounded when he realized that it contained the money of which the two banks had been rifled.

Oliver Optic.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

DOLLY GRAY.

'Twas a winding woodland way
Where I met you, Dolly Gray,
And you passed me with a glance
Of your hazel eyes askance,
But you never blushed nor turned,
While the heart within me burned,
Oh! you knew not how I yearned,
Dolly Gray!

Just a year ago, today,
Since I met you, Dolly Gray;
And the slightest word I speak
Paints a rose upon your cheek,
As we wonder 'neath the shade
Of the winding woodland glade.
What a change a year has made,
Dolly Gray!

James Buckham.

A MONTH IN THE MOON.*

The marvelous experiences that grew out of the Lunar Company, Limited—How the catch-penny scheme of three adventurers was transformed into an extraordinary contribution to the world of science—Scenes and incidents of a sojourn on the earth's satellite.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

MESSRS. GRYPHINS, VOGEL, AND WAGNER, three adventurers in Melbourne, Australia, start The Lunar Company, for the Conquest and Exploration of the Mineral Riches of the Moon. The control of the enterprise passes into the hands of Norbert Mauny, a young French scientist, who has a plan of attracting the moon to the earth by erecting a series of powerful magnets. The Bayouda Desert in the Soudan is selected as the site. At Suakim Mauny meets the French consul, M. Kersain, and his daughter Gertrude, who decide to accompany him on a visit to the Mogaddem of Rhadameh, a local ruler whose favor must be obtained before the transportation of the material across the desert can be made.

Norbert secures the coöperation he desires and the reflectors are erected on the Peak of Tehbali, where work proceeds with gratifying success till Messrs. Gryphins, Vogel, and Wagner are detected in a conspiracy to turn the workmen against Norbert. They are imprisoned, and then Norbert, hearing that trouble threatens Khartoum, where M. Kersain has been transferred, determines to go thither and see if he cannot induce him and his daughter to take refuge at the Peak.

It is finally arranged that Gertrude, accompanied by Dr. Briet, her uncle, and Fatima, her maid, accept the invitation.

Meantime Kaddour, the Mogaddem's dwarf, plans to destroy the work on which Mauny has built such high hopes. But he is taken captive and placed in charge of Virgil, Mauny's right hand man. Discovered in an attempt to win away the allegiance of the negro guard, he is condemned to be shot, but swallows poison just before the execution is to take place.

The magnets are working splendidly, and by the sixth day the moon is so close and appears so immense that Norbert's party are terrified. One of them rushes to the tablet where the knobs controlling all the motors are situated, raises one and lowers another. A fearful crash ensues and all are thrown into insensibility.

When they come to again the astounding discovery is made that the whole mountain of Tehbali has been transferred to the moon. As soon as he realizes what has happened, Norbert hastens to close and hermetically seal all the windows, in order that no air may escape, as the moon being without atmosphere, man cannot breathe there. However, he provides respirators, with which he and Sir Bucephalus Coghill are enabled to start out on an exploring trip, during which they discover an opening into the crater of an extinct volcano, which has become filled with air from the earth.

On the return to the observatory the body of the dwarf is found exposed to view by the recent catastrophe, and perceiving certain signs of life in it, Dr. Briet sets to work and soon has Kaddour restored to life, he having forced himself into a state of catalepsy. He is kindly treated by all and sensibly melts under these influences. Meanwhile petty thefts of food have been noticed, and it is discovered that Gryphins, Vogel, and Wagner are also on the moon.

On first beholding them Kaddour becomes much excited and begs Mauny to hand them over to him for punishment, for it turns out that they had kidnapped him when a boy and distorted his body in order to fit him to fill the place of a dwarf who had died and whom they had been exhibiting. But Norbert simply directs them to be placed in captivity again.

At the close of the moon's night of two weeks the alarming discovery is made that seven out

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of the eight tons of chlorate of potassium, used to furnish the party with oxygen, have been stolen by the captives. It is finally discovered at the bottom of the crater, and Norbert is strongly minded to put the culprits to death, but decides to grant them a respite till they can be brought before a tribunal on the earth. He places them under Kaddour's surveillance, who declares that he will wall up all the openings of their prison, leaving them only just space enough for breathing purposes.

CHAPTER XLIV (*Continued*).—THE STOLEN CHLORATE.

VIRGIL, and Kaddour were not long in collecting materials wherewith to close up the prisoners' breathing hole, till it was no bigger than the port hole of a vessel. The prisoners looked on in horror, terribly afraid that they were to be buried alive.

"My good friends," said Wagner, in hurried accents, "can it be possible that you intend to wall us up alive?"

"Since we have only a ton of chlorate left," said Virgil, "we must at least take care to keep it all for our own use."

Wagner and company looked at each other in dismay, and conversed apart in low tones.

"We have not destroyed the chlorate," explained Wagner, "and we are quite ready to indicate its whereabouts, if we are only treated a little better."

"Indeed!" replied Virgil, plastering on with supreme unconcern. "You are too late with that offer. It just happens that we can do without your chlorate."

"I am delighted to hear you say so," said Wagner, whose countenance denoted anything but unmixed satisfaction. "In that case, you would surely not punish a harmless offense so severely."

"Everything depends on the intention," said Virgil, as he laid his first stone.

"But surely you do not really mean to suffocate us?" cried Vogel, more and more terrified.

"What was your intention in taking away our air?" retorted the Algerian soldier.

The rascals were so ill advised as to turn to Kaddour.

"Sir," said Gryphins, "will you not intercede for us? We have not the pleasure of knowing you, but we cannot believe that such an odious crime will be perpetrated in your presence."

"No!" shouted the infuriated dwarf, who up to this moment had kept silence with difficulty, out of obedience to Norbert's instructions. "No! You cannot believe that so odious a crime can be perpetrated? Such things do happen, though, sometimes! Have you never heard talk of a certain child who was stolen from his family by two proprietors of a traveling circus, who walled him up for fifteen years in a steel corselet to prevent his growing? The story was related to me, and I thought I had never heard its equal for brutality. Shall I tell it to you, Peter Gryphins and Ignaz Vogel?"

The two wretches became perfectly livid; their eyes dilated, and seemed as if starting out of their sockets.

"Shall I tell you, my masters," pursued Kaddour, "how this child was sold by you to the Viceroy of Egypt; how at Cairo he lived the life of a curious beast or domestic animal for twelve years; how he fled to the desert, where he instigated rebellion and incited the natives to war; how he subsequently found himself in the moon; and how, throughout it all, one fixed idea governed him—the determination to be revenged on you? But I need not detail the history; you have recognized me, and you know now what to expect. Yes, Peter Gryphins; yes, Vogel; it is I—Midgy, Ex-General-in-Chief of the myrmidons of the Sultan of Batavia! I—whose flesh you cramped and mutilated, to sell it, first to the gaping public, then to a viceroy. I have grown a little—at least four inches—since you lost sight of me. The child's chin now bears a man's beard. But it is I, all the same, you scoundrels! I have you at last within my grasp, and I won't let you go!"

Kaddour might have gone on indefinitely in this strain; the unhappy men had ceased to listen to his words. Beside themselves with amazement and fear, they had fallen on their knees before him, beseeching mercy.

But he would not even look at them. Maddened with rage, he heaped stone upon stone in feverish haste, while Virgil quickly worked the plaster; and in a few minutes only a square aperture of a few inches in size remained for the passage of air.

CHAPTER XLV.—NEARING THE EARTH.

SOME minutes after the late terrible scene between Kaddour and his old tormentors, Virgil took provisions to them, and reassured the unfortunate men with the intelligence that the only penalty inflicted on them was to fetch the chlorate back from the bottom of the crater Rheticus.

They did this with such alacrity that the chlorate was all restored within twelve hours, although this entailed enlarging the orifice of the crater, going down it, and filling their sacks to take them to the observatory twenty seven times in succession.

The fabrication of oxygen now proceeded rapidly, while the machines were set going to charge the electro-accumulators. At the expiration of forty eight hours, the time fixed by Norbert, the preparations were completed.

The young scientist announced the welcome fact at breakfast time, and then proceeded quite calmly to establish contact.

"Now we start," he said, looking at his chronometer and making a note in his pocketbook. "We shall arrive in a hundred and fifty five hours and eight minutes, not counting the seconds."

"Arrive where?" asked Gertrude.

"In the Soudan. I had a motive yesterday in hurrying matters so. The position of the earth at this moment is such that we have every chance of descending on the desert of Bayouda. Had I waited one hour longer we should have fallen on Bengal or Cochin China. It was, you see, advisable to make as much haste as possible."

"If you had asked me," said Gertrude, pouting a little, "I would have preferred descending at Khartoum."

"Believe me, I should have been only too delighted to please you in this respect," murmured Norbert, "but there was one great difficulty in the way."

"What was that?"

"We should have had to wait seventeen years longer!"

Every one laughed on hearing this, not excepting Gertrude herself.

"And if some accident," pursued Norbert, "should have prevented our departure at the precise minute, the long delay would have been perfectly useless."

Life in the observatory went on the same as before, and it was difficult to believe that they were on the move. Only their implicit reliance on the calculations of the young astronomer led them to place faith in his assurances that they had really started. Before retiring to rest, however, they perceived a sensible difference in the diameter of the earth, now in her last quarter, and Norbert confirmed by micrometrical measurement the fact of her increased size.

The descent proceeded rapidly. Seventy hours after starting, the earth visibly increased in diameter, appearing like a large ball of a uniform color, on which the continents stood out distinctly, and were of a yellow hue, while the seas were steel gray.

The rotation was so plainly evident that the different regions of the globe made each their separate entry at the eastern side of the disc, passed like light clouds over its face, and disappeared on the other side.

"It reminds one of the figures in a magic lantern," said Gertrude, "making their appearance to the right and their exit at the left corner."

It was in truth a fairy-like scene. Through the telescope they could plainly discern mountain and forest, snow tipping the summits and clothing the polar regions, while a line no thicker than a hair was guessed to be the Mississippi or the Amazon, and a black speck here and there was evidently some large town.

Towards the hundred and twentieth hour, which corresponds to the fifth day, the interposition of the earth between the sun and the moon was sufficiently marked to bring on a night of seven hours. It could not be called an eclipse, for it was not a partial nor an instantaneous occultation of the solar disc, but its total disappearance behind a gigantic screen across all one side of the horizon.

When the sun reappeared, the clouds obscuring the earth parted for an instant, and Norbert distinctly saw through the telescope a sea dotted with vessels. It was the Mediterranean. The waters were so limpid that they did not hide the conformation of the ground intervening between Sicily, Sardinia, and Tripoli. Then the clouds closed again.

The final moment was approaching, and it was time to put the last touches to their preparations. Aided by the doctor, Virgil, and Kaddour, Norbert began by fitting the parachute on a large frame that had stood ready for the past eighteen days in the middle of the esplanade.

It was shaped like a triumphal arch, and bore in front a steel arm that turned freely on two well greased hinges. From the arm hung the cord that suspended the parachute, and a small electric cable was wound round the latter, having direct communication with the terminal of the magnetic mechanism.

Close by hung a chopping knife in its sheath, and by pressing a spring this knife would cut the cord and electric cable clean through. This would, at one and the same time, set the parachute free and arrest the magnetic action of Tehbali.

No one but Norbert knew the secret of this machinery, and he fully intended to keep it to himself, and leave nothing this time to chance.

The parachute was thirty yards across. It was made of the pieces of silk prepared in the storeroom, and pieced together by Gertrude and Fatima, under Norbert's superintendence. The cords of suspension were passed through a large hole in the center, and it was held open by a steel frame like an umbrella.

The car was hung by silken cords to the edge of the parachute, and was made of a slight circular framework two yards in diameter. Round this was a silk netting at elbow level, with eleven spaces left for the oxygen respirators that were subsequently to serve also for seats. A basket of provisions, a box of clothing, an aneroid barometer, and a thermometer completed the contents of the car.

The parachute had been ready for two or three hours, when the sun disappeared anew behind the terrestrial screen, and deep night prevailed in that part of the esplanade where the travelers were assembled. It was darker than any night they had ever seen, for not only was there not the slightest stream of starlight, but the sky itself was completely gone—its place was occupied by the terrestrial globe.

CHAPTER XLVI.—KADDOUR BARS THE WAY.

SEATED round a table, on which burnt an electric lamp, in the observatory drawing room, the castaways were silently awaiting Norbert's signal for departure.

On a sudden Norbert rose, and, turning to Gertrude, said :

"It is time. We have been a hundred and fifty four hours on the journey. In thirty eight minutes we shall be on the earth. It is time to set ourselves in the car."

"I am ready," answered Gertrude, rising at once. "Come, Fatima."

Led by the doctor, they went out to the esplanade, and took their seats in the car of the parachute. Norbert, who had accompanied them, returned to hurry Sir Bucephalus and Smith.

"There is no time to lose," he added. "I have just ascertained that the parachute is considerably out of the vertical position. In a quarter of an hour, at most, all must be finished! Do you take your places. Virgil, Kaddour, and I will go and bring the prisoners."

The baronet and his model domestic hastened to the esplanade, while

Norbert proceeded towards the storeroom to choose some respirators for the prisoners.

He had just reached the circular passage, holding his electric lamp, when a sharp blow on the right shoulder knocked the lamp out of his hand, and two strong arms at the same moment seized him round the waist.

"You were going without us, were you? But you shall not!" cried a voice that Norbert recognized as Wagner's. He struggled vigorously, and caught a glimpse between whiles of two more figures close at hand.

"Kaddour! Virgil! Help!" cried Norbert. "The prisoners have revolted!"

Happily, Kaddour and Virgil were not far off. They saw in the twinkling of an eye what had happened, and each rushed upon his man. Norbert, with the energy of despair, had mastered his assailant, and held him pinned to the ground by one knee on his chest. It was Peter Gryphins.

With a well directed blow Virgil knocked over Wagner, while Kaddour, seizing Vogel with his strong arms, brought him down with a bump.

"There you are, all three!" cried Virgil. "Scoundrels! to behave so, just when we came to liberate you. But how did they get here?" continued he, looking all round.

The electric lamp which had been deposited on the ground threw a ray of light on the wall, and made it evident that the stones had been quietly and patiently loosened; so that it needed but a well directed blow to knock them out and leave a great breach, through which the prisoners must have penetrated into the circular gallery.

It was necessary, however, to come to some immediate decision. Had the three visitors been armed, there could be little doubt that they would have summarily settled the matter. But as it was, they were at a loss how to turn their victory to account.

"If master and Kaddour could manage to hold this villain," said Virgil, "I can get some rope and have them all bound in a trice."

"Quite right," answered Norbert. "Hand us over your charge, and make haste."

Virgil did as he was bid. Seizing the already half strangled Wagner by the neck, he brought him over to Norbert and Kaddour, who gripped hold of him without slackening their grasp of the other two.

"Take the lantern with you!" shouted Norbert. "Don't lose a minute!"

Virgil obeyed, and disappeared into the storeroom. The prisoners at once struggled madly to escape, but they reckoned without their host, for Kaddour could easily have settled them all.

"If you dare to move again I will throttle you," he said, squeezing their throats, and chuckling horribly. The savage threat had the desired effect; not one dared to move again.

Virgil had already returned with a rope. He cut off several lengths with his pocket knife, and in a few minutes the three prisoners, strung together in a row like sausages, were placed standing against the wall. The fight had so exhausted them that they said not a word, but submitted silently.

"Quick, now, the respirators!" said Norbert.

Then he continued:

"We will fasten them on their chests, and carry these rascals to the parachute."

"What!" cried Kaddour. "Do you mean to take them after this attempt of theirs?"

"Their attempt has nothing to do with the question," replied Norbert. "These men ought to be judged and sentenced by a regular tribunal. I have vowed that the world shall know what they have done, and I will keep my vow. Come, Virgil, bring the respirators, and let us make an end of it, once and for all."

The Algerian soldier obeyed with military promptness, but Kaddour was not going to be silenced.

"It is incredible!" he said. "When you have ready to your hand such an easy way of punishing them, how can you take the trouble to drag them down to another tribunal? You shall leave them here. Have they not, by this last mean treachery, lost all title to your indulgence? Think you, had the tables been turned, that they would have saved you?"

"I do not model my conduct on theirs," replied Norbert coldly. "Not another word, Kaddour; these men are to come with us. It is true that they are vile wretches, the blackest villains ever seen, perhaps. But it shall never be said that I took upon myself to leave them exiled on the moon, with the inevitable prospect of death from suffocation."

Virgil came back with the respirators, and, fastening one on each prisoner, put the mouthpieces over their faces.

"Take this one first," said Norbert, pointing to Peter Gryphins.

Virgil took him up, but the dwarf did not move.

"I suppose I must help you, since Kaddour won't," said Norbert, stooping down to grasp the legs of the bound man.

But the dwarf planted himself at the door, and muttered hoarsely:

"These men shall not go out from here! *I will not have it!*"

A. Laurie.

(TO BE CONCLUDED.)

LOVE, THE MAGICIAN.

SING bird, ripple rill;
Purple is the distant hill;
Sky is bright, and day is clear.
Love is here.

Frown sky, vanish hill;
Mute the bird, and dry the rill;
All the day is drear and dead.
Love is fled.

George Brewster Gallup.